

DALIT MOVEMENT IN KARNATAKA



V.T. RAJSHEKAR SHETTY

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DALIT MOVEMENT IN KARNATAKA

V. T. RAJSHEKAR SHETTY

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Dedicated
to my
mother
VANAJA
who
disappeared
when I was
a toddler
and whose
fond memory
has been
the chief
driving force
for all my
life's mission.

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FOREWORD

This is a study of the Dalit movement in Karnataka.

Sri V. T. Rajshekar Shetty (born 1932) is a senior correspondent of the *Indian Express*, Bangalore. He has served on many national English dailies in Bombay and New Delhi. His widely publicised articles in the *Indian Express* chain on Karnataka Dalits have earned him the reputation of a keen student of the Dalits of the State. This has led the CISRS to invite him to undertake a book on the subject, which he has kindly done. The writing was completed in 1976 and no attempt has been made to up date the data it contains.

We are grateful to Sri Shetty for his contribution to the Institute's series of publications on Religion and Society. The Institute has been engaged in the study of the problems of the Dalits of India. They have defied solution so far. The relation between class and caste in the Indian society is so complex that even an effective socio-political philosophy of action for the liberation of the Dalits has not emerged. Sri Shetty has approached the problem as a leftist and a rationalist. Christians concerned with justice for the Dalits will benefit not only by the facts here surveyed but also by the interpretation which Sri Shetty has given to them, for which he alone is responsible.

This publication, as all our other publications is meant not only for Christians but for the larger Indian public.

Director, C.I.S.R.S.

June, 1978.

PREFACE

I am thankful to the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, for commissioning me to write this book provoked by my article of the same title in the *Indian Express*, August 12, 1975.

This book is the result of a sociological research, conducted over a decade, which probes into one of the most crucial problems facing Karnataka in particular and the whole country in general. The different facets of the Dalit problem discussed in this book, therefore, are viewed with and written in an all-India perspective. I have humbly aspired to cover every aspect of the Dalit movement and the manuscript was prepared after ten years of deep study and interviews with scores of writers, researchers, intellectuals, political leaders, social workers and sympathisers of the Dalit cause who were living in different parts within the State and elsewhere. In this endeavour I have been fortunate to have been able, as a journalist, to follow the whole process of the development of the Dalit movement at close quarters.

The problem dealt with in this book is that of the voiceless millions of Dalits who are ground into the dust every day as victims of the worst form of barbarity and organised tyranny to which even the wildest of animals are not subjected. They remain hungry, naked, dispirited, cramped and crushed in dingy hovels ; abandoned socially, economically, politically, morally, religiously, mentally and physically, yet surprisingly they adhere tenaciously to Hinduism. They have been denied education, self-respect, and the right to lead a decent human existence in a civilised society. Let us not forget that these beasts of burden form at least 50 to 60 per cent of Karnataka's three crore population. Do they deserve this satanic treatment ? Has the milk of human kindness evaporated at its source ?

Since this is the first study of its kind in Karnataka and perhaps in the whole country, I have made it a point to make

the pursuit of truth my sole objective. And as such I have kept myself free from all prejudices. In presenting the facts of the case, I might have acted without fear or favour but in this bid I had no other consideration in mind except that of a student of history and sociology. Therefore, I have no desire to wound anybody's feelings or sentiments, bearing rancour and malice towards none. I appeal to the Brahmins, Lingayats, Vokkaligas and Bunts alike, not to view this book as an attack on any particular caste or community, but, as a simple treatise on our society as it exists today.

I am sure that all those who sincerely believe in the urgency of social change—a cry that is so much in the air these days—will welcome this book, and I hope that my humble efforts and sincere appeal will not fail to arouse the consciousness of my readers. In case they fail to do so, I am not to be blamed. The world is coloured yellow to the jaundiced eye. I can do nothing about such a malignant form of communalism. In Hindu India it is unfortunate that the very people who are the victims of communalism are so often accused of being communal. Because of the existing system of elitist-oriented education logic, reasoning, science and rational thinking have become something alien to us. This is our greatest tragedy.

There is, however, always a tiny section even among this elitist group that is free from prejudice. And if this section, however small it may be, appreciates this book, my aim will be realised. It is in the hands of this progressive section that the future of the country rests. And if this coterie sheds a tear or two for these dumb, driven cattle, nothing will bring me greater joy and sense of fulfilment. To that extent this humble effort of mine would have contributed to social change.

Perhaps, some readers and critics may charge me with loading the text with too many quotations, some of which are also too long. But had I not done so, the same persons would have accused me of furnishing no proof for my arguments. In a sociological and historical study of a contemporary movement, references of this nature are unavoidable. Hence, I request readers to bear with me.

My thanks are due to all those scores of people who readily provided me with reference material, my fellow journalists sympathetic to the Dalit cause, to my niece Vijaya Hegde and my son Salil but for whose co-operation I would not have been able to finish the book on time.

‘ Sita ’,
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June 20, 1976.

V. T. RAJSHEKAR SHETTY.

CHAPTER I

SHYAM SUNDER—FATHER OF INDIA'S DALIT MOVEMENT

I. A Legend

If Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is universally recognised as the undisputed leader of the Indian untouchables, the credit for transposing many of his revolutionary thoughts into an action-packed programme goes to Shyam Sunder and his formidable Bhim Sena, a 2-lakh strong self-defence force of militant, dedicated scheduled caste youth, which created a tremendous impact particularly in the three States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Shyam Sunder was a legend in his life time—a scholar, orator, thinker, philosopher, poet, agitator, writer and a parliamentarian—a rare combination in one person. He was born at Aurangabad on December 18, 1908 in a scheduled caste family, the son of Baddula Manickyam, a railwayhead constable. He passed his B.A. from Osmania University and after studying law he soon jumped into youth and trade union movements and from then onwards it was a mighty saga of stormy, endless battle. It was a tragedy that such a glorious career came to an abrupt end and the Bhim Sena found no worthy leader to carry the torch of socio-economic revolution lit by Shyam Sunder. It was a pity that all the top leaders of the Bhim Sena soon deserted it to find berths in cosy corners, leaving the movement in disarray and the youth in disillusion.

Shyam Sunder was a man of sterling qualities, a child at heart though a man of steel when it came to the question of striking at those who harmed the untouchables. A true friend and a devoted follower of Dr. Ambedkar, he went a step further and successfully fought for the cause of the Dalits. India, he said, belongs to the Dalits and they and they alone shall rule it. He gave Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's name to his

Bhim Sena which unlike many other Senas that sprang up at that time, stood for noble and upright causes. Indeed the Bhim Sena could be considered to be the father of the Dalit Panther movement of Maharashtra and for that matter of the entire Dalit movement in India.

P. R. Venkataswamy, a Dalit leader from Hyderabad, in his two-volume book, *Our Struggle for Emancipation* (1955) pays glowing tributes to Shyam Sunder, and his contributions to the Dalit movement. His entry into the Dalit struggle was hailed by Venkataswamy as a 'red letter day in the history of the community'. This happened as far back as May 30, 1942 at Parbhani, Maharashtra, where the Marathwada Depressed Classes Association held its general body meeting under the presidentship of Shyam Sunder.¹

In his epoch-making work, *Mool Bharatis* (Original Indians) Shyam Sunder bluntly told the untouchables: 'We were the rulers of this country before the advent of the uncultured Aryans We Mool Bharatis are not and have never been Hindus and are not prepared to establish a Hindu Raj in India'. In a memorandum submitted to Sir Mirza Ismail, President of the Nizam's Executive Council, by the 'Independent Scheduled Caste Federation', Shyam Sunder said, 'on behalf of the 40-lakhs of untouchables of Hyderabad State': ' the Scheduled Castes have repeatedly declared that their community is a distinct element and a separate entity in the national life of India. The Hindu religion is an alien one, and as the Scheduled Castes are the aboriginal inhabitants of this land, with a glorious historical background and distinct mode of life in customs and rituals, worshipping their own indigenous goddesses, they are entirely different from the Hindus. From time immemorial they have been kept aloof from the Hindus whose religion is based upon the inhuman subjugation and degradation of human beings. The Hindus not only despise them as social and political untouchables but it is their *punya dharma* (avowed religious faith) to treat them as the meanest and lowest strata of humanity. They are treated as untouchables, and even unapproachables

¹ P. R. Venkataswamy, '*Our struggle for Emancipation*,' (1955) Vol. I, p. 244.

and unseeables. By bringing the Scheduled Castes constitutionally under the subjugation of such a ruthless religious fold, the Government is treading on a dangerous path of perpetuation of social injustice and exploitation and thereby sowing seeds of discontentment and disruption in the political growth of the State in general and the Scheduled Castes in particular.’²

He called the Bhim Sena a self-defence force based on truth and justice. ‘It represents the eyes and ears and limbs of the scheduled castes and tribes’, he said. A mistaken impression was sought to be created in certain quarters that the Bhim Sena was a band of anti-social elements and often indulged in violence. But this was an opinion born out of prejudice. During this writer’s tour of Hyderabad—Karnataka to study the Bhim Sena movement, a number of leaders including those belonging to the Congress were interviewed. One thing that could be observed was that almost every leader of this area—whether he belonged to the Congress, Muslim League or any other party or was in Government service—was in some way or other indebted to Shyam Sunder. In a short time he had created an impact on the people belonging to diverse castes, communities and religions. It is a wonder that a man born in a poor and that too an untouchable family could rise to such heights in spite of much opposition.

If at all there was any true Dalit movement in India, it was started by Shyam Sunder and his Bhim Sena. And the entire untouchable population of the districts of Nanded and Aurangabad in Maharashtra and the three districts of Hyderabad—Karnataka owe their present position to the historic role played by Shyam Sunder and the Bhim Sena. The untouchables in these areas may have remained as poor and backward as their counterparts in the rest of the country, but nowhere else could one see such tremendous awareness and awakening among the Dalits. The Bhim Sena has succeeded in striking terror into the hearts of the caste Hindus and particularly those of the landed gentry. Scheduled caste youth can now walk with their heads held high. This is no

² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 344.

mean achievement and no parallel to this can be found anywhere in the whole of South India. And that is why even Congress leaders of this area unanimously acknowledge the contribution of Shyam Sunder. The scheduled caste youth in these parts are well-versed in Ambedkar literature. They are also conscious of their rights as human beings. The politically powerful Lingayat landed gentry will now have to think twice before resorting to brutalities against the untouchables.

How forcefully the Bhim Sena repulsed the caste Hindu atrocities on the untouchables could be proved from the following incident that invited nation-wide attention as late as 1974. Rarely does one hear of a ruling party M.L.A., hailing from a rich landlord class, being dragged out of his house and beaten up in broad daylight and that too openly in a city. The Bhim Sena did just this and proved to the world how furious the untouchables could turn when they were hurt. The incident made headlines in the national press and provoked upheavals in the Karnataka State Legislature too.

A scheduled caste maid servant called Ningamma, employed by a rich Lingayat landlord, Shankar Shetty Patil, also a former Congress M.L.A., died at Kamalapur under suspicious circumstances and the doctor's verdict was suicide. Bhim Sena leaders rushed to the spot and started an agitation and Shyam Sunder addressed a large public meeting at Gulbarga. Following this agitation, the body of Ningamma was exhumed and the doctor certified her death as a case of murder.

Gulbarga: 'A mob of 1,000 Harijans, mostly students, attacked the residence of a Congress M.L.A., Mr. Subhas Patil, here yesterday and are alleged to have assaulted him and his father. The students were agitated over an allegation that a Harijan woman had been murdered at the M.L.A.'s house in Kamalapur village on November 13. They surrounded his house here, subjected it to a barrage of stones and then broke in and seized the M.L.A. and his father. Then they took out a procession demanding his arrest. The police registered a case against 200 students for rioting and assaulting the M.L.A. and his father. It had been reported earlier from Kamalapur that the Harijan woman, Ningamma, had committed suicide. But later, on a representation made by Harijan leaders, a post-mortem revealed

that Ningamma had been strangled. Since then the police have registered a case of murder.' (*Times of India*, December 16, 1964). Three persons including Hemachandra, son of Shankar Shetty Patil, have been arrested for the murder of Ningamma, adds *Deccan Herald*.

The incident created a big sensation and electrified the entire State of Karnataka and the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra districts, teaching a fitting lesson to the caste Hindus that violence shall be met with violence if the untouchables are harmed, said Hanumappa Shreyeskar (born 1938), the main-spring of the Bhim Sena.

S. H. Katti, a Government doctor rendering free service to untouchables in the very heart of Jagat, the Bhim Sena stronghold in Gulbarga city, said he owed his active career to Shyam Sunder.

II. Harijan-Muslim Axis

Besides the great awakening that Shyam Sunder brought among the untouchables, perhaps his greatest contribution before independence was in forging an alliance between the scheduled castes and the Muslims. The concept of Harijan-Muslim axis was something novel in the country and Shyam Sunder propounded this magic theory that had tremendous potentialities, after making a deep sociological research into the problems of both the persecuted communities. Such an alliance would be for their mutual benefit. He thought the country's salvation could be found in the union of these two oppressed communities—a combined force that could bring about a socio-economic revolution in the caste-ridden society.

In trying to befriend the Muslims to strengthen the Dalit cause he ran the risk of being dubbed a Muslim agent. A Jan Sangh weekly, *Organiser*, from Delhi even called him a traitor. He was called a Razaakar although he had been bitterly opposing Kasim Razvi and had nothing to do with any of its anti-national activities. Many of his close associates, now in the Congress Party, have testified to this effect when interviewed by this writer. No less a person than Uma Shankar Dikshit, former Union Home Minister and Governor of Karnataka and a personal friend of Shyam Sunder, had then

written to Malkani, editor of the Jan Sangh weekly, contradicting its jaundiced reports.

If he had loved Muslims more than caste Hindus, it was because he had strong grounds to do so. After all, the entire Dalit population of Hyderabad State had to be grateful to the Nizam and his regime for the help rendered to the cause of Dalits. And Dr. Ambedkar appreciated his stand along with many fair-minded among the caste Hindus. In trying to go to the defence of Muslims—who were also part of India and hence were Indians—Shyam Sunder might have suffered the ignominy of being dubbed an anti-national. But he could not help it. Caste Hindus did not spare even Dr. Ambedkar from such a charge.

If ever the history of the country is to be rewritten, when values are re-assessed, events are viewed afresh and national leaders are re-tested, Shyam Sunder is sure to emerge as a true patriot with the interests of the country genuinely at heart.

Addressing a meeting of Muslims and untouchables as communal riots gripped Hyderabad, he declared his unalterable conviction that justice and social, economic and political rights could never be expected from high caste Hindus, with whom it was an 'article of faith to condemn the untouchable to a life of rankest serfdom'. So he was not prepared to entrust the destiny of the untouchables to the State Congress which was 'cent per cent Hindu in outlook' and expect from it any fair deal.³

On another occasion, he said: 'It is a well-known fact that the Muslims do not treat the Depressed Classes in the way the Hindus are doing. As they believe in equality and justice to one and all both by religion and faith, naturally the Depressed Classes feel more at home with them rather than with the chauvinistic, class-conscious and highly individualistic Hindus. So long as this is the code of the Hindu, I am afraid, the gulf will become wider and wider.'⁴

In the wake of these developments the *Hindu* (October 15, 1947) carried a report from the Nagpur correspondent saying

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 420.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 421.

that the Hyderabad State had launched a large conversion drive of Depressed Classes in Berar with the financial backing of Rs. 2 crores by the State Government. But this mischievous report was immediately contradicted by the scheduled caste leaders including Shyam Sunder. It was at this crucial stage in the history of the country that Dr. Ambedkar saved the situation by delivering an important statement clarifying the attitude of the scheduled castes towards national freedom and also towards Muslims :

Notwithstanding the gloomy prospect for the scheduled castes who are in India, I would like to tell the scheduled castes who happen today to be impounded inside Pakistan to come over to India by such means as may be available to them. The Congress Party has weakened the political safeguards necessary for the scheduled castes under the new Constitution to such an extent as to make them worse than useless. None the less, our numbers are so great that if we are well organised we cannot fail to influence the Government of the day, no matter who are in charge of it even if we have no safeguards. I, therefore, suggest to those who are in Pakistan to come over to India.

The second thing I want to say is that it would be fatal for the scheduled castes, whether in Pakistan or in Hyderabad, to put their faith in the Muslims or the Muslim League. It has become a habit with the scheduled castes to look upon the Muslims as friends simply because they dislike Hindus. This is a mistaken view. The Muslims wanted the support of the scheduled castes but they never gave their support to the scheduled castes. Mr. Jinnah was all the time playing a double game. He was very insistent that the scheduled castes were a separate entity when it suited him, but when it did not suit him he insisted with emphasis that they were Hindus. The Muslims and the Muslim League, charged as they are with the passion to make the Muslims a governing class as quickly as possible, will never give consideration to the claims of the scheduled castes. This I speak from experience.

As regards conversion to Islam, I ask all the scheduled castes not to succumb to it as an easy way of escape. I cannot say that they should die rather than be converted. What I say is that they must look upon it as a last resort forced upon them by violence. And even to those who are converted by force and violence I say that they must not regard themselves as lost to the fold for ever. Fortunately, for us we are not hampered by the rules of the Hindu Shastras according to which once a convert always a convert. To all those who are forcibly

converted I pledge my word that if they wish to come back I shall see that they are received back into the fold and treated as brethren in the same manner in which they were treated before conversion.

To the scheduled castes of Hyderabad I want to say that they should under no circumstances side with the Nizam and the Anjuman-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimin. Whatever the tyranny and oppression which the Hindus practise on us, it must not warp our vision and swerve us from our duty. The scheduled castes need freedom and their whole movement has been one of freedom. That being so, they cannot support the Nizam.⁵

Shyam Sunder too fully shared this feeling. In fact, he was hated by the Razaakars and their leader Kasim Razvi. That was the reason why he was not included in the Interim Government.

Narayanarao Durgkar, a caste Hindu retired teacher of Gulbarga, told this writer that Shyam Sunder was perhaps befriended by the Muslims and the Nizam to fight back the 'revivalist activities' of the Arya Samaj which by then had made serious inroads into the princely Hyderabad State with the avowed objective of neutralising the Muslim influence.

It was the upper caste Hindus who drove him more and more into the arms of the Muslims. Coupled with this, Dr. Ambedkar's threat to embrace Islam if the demands of the untouchables were not conceded, further upset the orthodox Hindus who redoubled their efforts to woo the untouchables. The Hindu Mahasabha under the guidance of Veer Savarkar formed the Hyderabad State Anti-Untouchability League for the eradication of untouchability. The immediate programme of the League was temple-entry. The other object was to make the 'Depressed Class Hindus feel that they are Hindus first and last and extend to them all elementary social, religious and national rights enjoyed by Caste Hindus.'⁶ To him, religion as such had no answer to the problems of exploitation. His stand on religion was that of a Marxist and a rationalist. That was the secret of his great friendship with Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker of Tamil Nadu. Indeed Shyam Sunder had rejected all religions and only sympathised with

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 426-427.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 361.

the plight of the Muslims. Nothing more. He opposed the conversion of scheduled castes either to Islam or Christianity or even to Buddhism. He said, 'we are co-operating with our Muslim brethren and that does not mean we are converting to Islam.'⁷ He said, 'Mool Bharatis' had no religion and hence there was no question of conversion. 'By changing a religion, the social and economic condition of the untouchables will not change', he commented. He often advised untouchables not to seek salvation in conversion but at the same time he never failed to attack caste Hindus for driving them into the arms of other religions. Speaking on the budget demands in the Karnataka Assembly, he devoted a major portion of his speech to highlight the 'inhuman treatment meted out to untouchables in the Hindu religion' as the cause of conversion of the untouchables to Christianity. Pointing out the dangers posed to the solidarity of the country by conversions he said : 'Foreign funds are pouring into India to finance Christian missionaries engaged in conversions and because of this the Christian population is soaring day by day. If conversions go on at this rate, these foreign countries financing this work may gradually spread their political influence on India. And this country may again lose its hard-won independence. If such a tragedy strikes India, the responsibility for this must be strongly placed on the caste Hindus for treating the untouchables worse than animals. The caste Hindus have been eye-witnesses to this tragedy and yet they have deliberately and consciously overlooked the whole problem. Every day hundreds of untouchables are getting converted to Christianity. There is no need to go far to prove these mass conversions. In one district of Bidar alone over 22,000 untouchables have embraced Christianity so far. Several more will do so in time to come. Does it not prove the bankruptcy of Dharma ?'⁸

A great friend of the down-trodden, Shyam Sunder, through his innumerable writings incessantly worked for the joint front of these 'two largest minority communities'—

⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 405-406.

⁸ Speech delivered in Karnataka Assembly, Bangalore, on June 19, 1957 as translated by J. P. Sarwesh.

untouchables and tribals forming 30 per cent of the country's population and Muslims comprising about 13 per cent of the total. Since both the communities suffered from identical problems such as discrimination, deprivation, exploitation and poverty both should join hands to fight the caste Hindu prejudices and the Brahminical tyranny, he said.

Presiding over the Aurangabad Depressed Classes Conference, he stated: 'The time had now come when they should declare an open revolt against caste Hindus and join hands with Muslims for the betterment of their conditions. The Muslims are the only people who can deliver their goods because they profess a religion which teaches them equality, liberty and fraternity among human beings. They can successfully collaborate with Muslims in this political fight for freedom.'⁹

In his fiery book, *National Integration and Problems of Minorities*, Shyam Sunder pointed out the 'fast-declining economic position' of the Muslims in India and listed the causes of different prejudices against them. Although an atheist himself, he had great affection and affinity towards the Muslims because of Islam's 'humanistic outlook, broad-mindedness, brotherhood of humanity'. In many ways he found Islam closest to socialism.

As a trusted friend of the Nizam's, Shyam Sunder enjoyed the highest confidence of the Muslims all over the country. The Nizam gifted a fund of Rs. one crore—indeed a mighty amount then—to establish a chain of hostels and welfare organisations for the untouchables. It was for this reason that in the Hyderabad—Karnataka area, which had a sizeable Muslim population, and its border districts of Andhra and Maharashtra, Shyam Sunder is even now remembered as the 'doyen of minorities'. Hafiz Khan, a leading lawyer of Gulbarga and a close associate, said that Shyam Sunder's dream of Harijan-Muslim unity was not fulfilled because there was no progressive leadership among the Muslims to reciprocate these high ideals. But Hafiz Khan was sure that this unity alone could

⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 2, p. 387.

save the Muslims, and urged the Muslim youth to join the Bhim Sena.

In his booklet, *Federation is a must for Indian Minorities*, Shyam Sunder propounded the theory that (1) Scheduled castes and tribes, (2) Muslims, (3) Christians and Anglo-Indians, (4) Sikhs and (5) Parsis are minorities. He quoted Gandhi's article in *Harijan*, October 21, 1939 in defence of his argument to include Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes among minorities. The policy of consolidating the North and balkanising the South on a linguistic basis has adversely affected the already precarious conditions of minorities, he said, supporting K. M. Panikar who had demanded further division of larger North Indian States like Uttar Pradesh etc.

'Shyam Sunder Saheb', as he was fondly called by hundreds of his followers, died at the age of 68 at Hyderabad on May 19, 1975—following a heart attack—thus bringing to end an epoch-making career spanning over 40 years of his turbulent life. Perhaps no scheduled caste leader had risen to such intellectual heights after Dr. Ambedkar. Born in Maharashtra (Aurangabad), he lived in Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad) and worked mostly in Karnataka, while his influence had spread practically over the whole country.

A bachelor, teetotaler and a strict disciplinarian, Shyam Sunder was known for his spotless character and led a simple, pious and flawless life. He was master of several languages—Urdu, Marathi, English, Hindi and he also knew a bit of Kannada. Hundreds of people used to throng to hear his spell-binding speeches in Urdu and listened to him with rapt attention. Despite his high contacts and lucrative practice at the bar, he died penniless having spent everything that he had for the cause of the Dalits. He had travelled widely both in India and abroad and was chosen to represent Hyderabad State at the U.N. Security Council, 'as the sole representative of the 90 lakh untouchables of Hyderabad State', in the delegation.

He was an M.L.A. (1957-1961) of the Karnataka Assembly. Shyam Sunder also held important positions in the Hyderabad Assembly as its Deputy Speaker. He was at one time the President of the Nizam Railway Employees Union, President

of the Scheduled Caste Federation of India established by Dr. Ambedkar and also the President of the All-India Depressed Classes Association, besides holding a host of other offices. Reporters covering the Karnataka State Assembly proceedings told this writer that he was a parliamentarian of great stature whose fiery speeches were listened to with utmost respect. He had intimate contacts with internationally reputed intellectuals like Harold Laski and Jean Paul Satre. Shyam Sunder made the best use of his visit abroad to apprise world leaders about the plight of untouchables. 'His comparison of the pathetic plight of the depressed classes to the segregation of negroes created an indelible impression on the world diplomatic parlours. He was given a place of honour everywhere as the true representative of sixty million 'untouchables', 'unapproachables', 'unseeables' and 'unshadowables' of 'the land of Tagore and Gandhi.'¹⁰ The moment he arrived in Hyderabad he was arrested and his rented room in the legislature hostel raided. Books and papers, two chairs, a table, a cushion and a carpet with a white sheet over it (which was all his mundane property), were publicly auctioned and the proceeds adjusted towards arrears of rent.

III. Four Demands

Shyam Sunder Saheb had charted clear-cut roads for the liberation of Dalits. In his book, *The Four Immediate Needs*, he placed the following four demands of the scheduled castes before the country: Surrender of twenty-five per cent of villages in every taluk, a separate electorate, a separate scheduled caste university in each State and a strong political organisation for untouchables. He reiterated these demands while presiding over the first session of the Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes and Minorities Convention at Lucknow in 1968. 'The four immediate demands' are the results of the Convention of Scheduled Caste workers held at Nanded (Maharashtra) on January 1, 1965 over which Shyam Sunder presided. Since the first demand is of far reaching importance to the Dalits of India, the full text is produced below :

¹⁰ P. R. Venkataswamy, 'Our Struggle for Emancipation', Vol. II, p. 559.

Resolution No. 1 : ‘Dalitastan’

It is in the interest of our country that the history and technique of oppression of the Scheduled Castes should be forgotten both by the oppressors and the oppressed.

If the new generation of the Scheduled Castes continues to live in their traditional surroundings, they will continue to be reminded of their past at every stage. The natural reaction of this will be that feelings of bitterness, revenge and hatred will begin to be nurtured in their hearts and some day the volcano might erupt. This will be bad for the country as a whole and for all concerned.

Sane thinkers among the scheduled castes have for long thought over the mischievous possibilities of untouchables' hamlets existing side by side with prosperous villages inhabited by caste Hindus and have realised that the most effective remedy for warding off the continuing mischief is to resettle the scheduled castes in new villages where they can live peacefully and carry on their economic activities unhampered by the curse of untouchability.

The late Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in a brochure entitled the ‘Rights of the minorities in a free India’ has discussed this question at length. A few extracts are reproduced below which stress the necessity for new settlements.

‘This is a demand justified by circumstances. At present the Hindus live in the village and untouchables live in the ghettos. The object is to free the untouchables from the thralldom of the Hindus. So long as the present arrangement continues, it is impossible for the untouchables either to free themselves from the yoke of the Hindus or to get rid of their untouchability. It is the close-knit association of the untouchables with the Hindus living in the same villages which marks them out as untouchables. India is admittedly a land of villages and so long as the village system provides an easy method of marking out and identifying the untouchables, the untouchable has no escape from untouchability. It is the system of the village plus the ghetto which perpetuates untouchability and the untouchables, therefore, demand that the nexus should be broken and the untouchables who are as a matter of fact socially a separate community should be made separate geographically and territorially also, and be settled into separate villages exclusively of untouchables in which the distinction of the high and the low and of touchable and untouchable will find no place.

‘The second reason for demanding separate settlement arises out of the economic position of the untouchables in the

villages. That their condition is most pitiable no one will deny. They are a body of landless labourers who are entirely dependent upon such employment as the Hindus may choose to give them and on such wages as the Hindus may find it profitable to pay. In the villages in which they live they cannot engage in any trade or occupation, for owing to untouchability no Hindu will deal with them. It is, therefore, obvious that there is no way of earning a living which is open to the untouchables so long as they live in a ghetto as a dependent part of the Hindu village.

‘This economic dependence has also other consequences besides the condition of poverty and degradation which proceeds from it. The Hindu has a code of life, which is part of his religion. This code of life gives him many privileges and heaps upon the untouchable many indignities which are incompatible with the dignity and sanctity of human life. The untouchables all over India are fighting against the indignities and injustices which the Hindus in the name of their religion have heaped upon them. A perpetual war is going on every day in every village between the Hindus and the untouchables. The Hindu press is not prepared to give it publicity, lest it should injure the cause of their freedom in the eyes of the world. The existence of a grim struggle between the Touchable and the Untouchable is, however, a fact. Under the village system the untouchable has found himself greatly handicapped in this struggle for free and honourable life. It is a contest between the Hindus who are economically and socially strong and the untouchables who are economically poor and numerically small.

‘That the Hindus most often succeed in suppressing the untouchables is due to many causes. The Hindus have the police and the magistracy on their side. In a quarrel between the untouchables and the Hindus, the untouchables will never get protection from the police and justice from the magistrate. The police and the magistracy naturally love their class more than their duty. But the chief weapon in the armory of the Hindus is economic power which they possess over the poor untouchables living in the village. The proposal may be dubbed escapism. But the only alternative is perpetual slavery.’

The above quotations from Dr. Ambedkar convincingly prove the need for compact and self-supporting villages for the scheduled castes so that their new generation should forget their ugly past and grow up as self-respecting and useful citizens.

How this plan should be drawn up and executed is a matter that might be entrusted to a committee consisting of one or two members of the Planning Commission, a representative of the Finance Ministry, a representative of the Ministry for Rehabili-

tation and Resettlement with at least an equal number of leaders of the scheduled castes, such as Mr. Jagjivan Ram, Sri. B. K. Gaikwad, M.P., and Sri. B. Shyam Sunder along with a few well-known international experts such as Baron Von Haimendroff, Dr. Ralph J. Bunche and a representative of the United Nations.

An easy and practicable alternative to the above demand may be that 25% of the villages in every taluk should be handed over to the scheduled caste population of the taluks and new colonies may be set up for the caste Hindus who will have to vacate their former homes and lands. Government should, of course, compensate the caste Hindus for the property left by them while adequate finances should be provided to the scheduled castes for developing their own economy in the villages freshly occupied by them. The arrangement presupposes that the scheduled caste population of the entire taluk is rehabilitated in the 25% of the villages set apart for them.

If this scheme is implemented taluk-wise, things can be managed without much dislocation and with the minimum of cost. It is obvious that the Patels, Patwaries and other officials of the scheduled caste villages will be members of their own community. These villages will have their own Panchayats and Samithies which will train them in the art of local self-government and make decentralization of power a reality. This, in short, is the demand of 120 million scheduled castes spread all over India and they will be satisfied with nothing less.

But this resolution still remains on paper and there is not the ghost of a chance that it will be considered. Shyam Sunder's most trusted lieutenants have become all Congress legislators now—at least a dozen of them like J. P. Sarwesh, Mallikarjuna Kharge, Dharma Singh, Siddique, Shivanna, etc. Even B. Basavalingappa, who is presently the most powerful scheduled caste leader in Karnataka, was his follower. Almost every leader of these three districts had been his devotee at one time or other and when interviewed by this writer they admitted that they owed their entire career to Shyam Sunder.

Dr. Rudriah, a retired Director of Animal Husbandry of the Karnataka Government and a close associate, was sorry that Shyam Sunder died before his magnum opus, *They Burn*, was published. In all, he has written over eight books, some in Urdu of which he had extraordinary command. They include *Diksha*, the assessment of 5,000 years of history and culture of India, and '*Federation is a must for India's Mino-*

rities'. His novel *Zindagi-Ek-Safar*, highlighting the problem of leprosy and rehabilitation of the cured patients is being filmed.

The Bhim Sena leader died perhaps a forlorn man. Neither his cherished desire to establish a Harijan-Muslim axis to fight the Brahminical Hinduism nor his dream of liberating the Dalits came true during his lifetime. But he laid a strong foundation for posterity to make these twin ambitions a living reality. He died in harness—fighting all through his life as an Opposition leader. Throughout his life, Shyam Sunder had not even a room for himself—not to speak of a house—having lived all his life with different friends. The best efforts of friends including Jagjivan Ram, later Union Agricultural Minister, to bring him into the Congress fold failed. One more effort was made at the time of the Congress Party split by luring him with many tempting offers. But he rejected them all since he was convinced that under the existing socio-economic set-up of the country, nobody however high or mighty, could bring about any change. It was the system that needed change and this could not be achieved by seeking high offices. This was his firm opinion.

Addressing a press conference a few months before his death he said : 'Caste Hindus are incapable of governing the country. The urban areas have been transformed into carnivals and the villages are a hell to live in.' Addressing a mammoth public meeting in Bangalore, he 'denounced the caste system based on rebirth and worship of wealth'. He criticised the U.S. for financing communal parties like the Jan Sangh and R.S.S. 'Because, if the caste system survives in India capitalism will survive,' he said. He said at another press conference at Gulbarga (June 12, 1969) that the entire wealth which was accumulated in the hands of caste Hindus was the property of Harijans. If it was not returned voluntarily, the Bhim Sena would snatch it for the betterment of humanity.

Speaking to a group of college students who barged into his room in Bangalore at the height of the pro-J.P. agitation urging him to support the 'Total Revolution', he said under the existing social conditions, India would have no revolution.

Those who wanted revolution must first crush Brahminism which provided the best bulwark for the forces of *status quo*. 'Without fighting the Sanatana Dharma you cannot have revolution,' he said.

IV. Burning of Gods

The Bhim Sena created havoc for caste Hindus in Hyderabad—Karnataka. The State Government led by Nijalingappa and then by Veerendra Patil—both Lingayats—kept a close watch on its movements and filed several cases against Bhim Sena leaders who had publicly asked untouchables to burn the 'Hindu gods' and 'Holy scriptures' that were responsible for the creation of untouchability. Despite the best efforts of the Government it could hardly make a dent on the Bhim Sena movement which had grown to giant size.

Shivram Moga of the Republican Party of India said Shyam Sunder revolutionised the entire scheduled caste youth in this area. While Dr. Ambedkar followed Buddha's non-violence, Shyam Sunder wanted violent changes. That was the reason why unlike Dr. Ambedkar, he did not embrace Buddhism. He liked the philosophy of Buddhism though he did not like to adopt that religion. He did not join the R.P.I. since it enjoyed also the support of the caste Hindus and had political ambitions. That was why he wanted the Bhim Sena to be confined to social and cultural revolution through which alone he believed salvation to the Dalits could be found. The Bhim Sena was inaugurated on April 29, 1968, at a big rally in Jagat in the heart of Gulbarga city, to coincide with the 77th birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar. It grew quickly in strength. *Indian Express* (May 1, 1968) report, headlined 'Bhim Sena begins with a blaze,' said: 'Basaveshwara, whose 8th century festival is being celebrated by the Lingayats, was also not spared by the Sena volunteers. Harijan women and children danced before the flames along with volunteers shouting that the Hindu religion is an embodiment of corruption and power-drunk demon'. *Deccan Herald* (May 3, 1968) carried a story from its Gulbarga correspondent that the Sena was organised with Mallikarjuna M. Kharge, advocate, as the chief organiser.

Shyam Sunder toured the whole country establishing its branches in U.P., Maharashtra, Punjab, West Bengal, Karnataka, Andhra and Delhi. The formation of Bhim Sena created a flutter in the whole of Karnataka. 'Chief Minister Veerendra Patil told the Legislative Council that the Government was watching the activities of Bhim Sena. He said Shyam Sunder who had announced the birth of Bhim Sena had said the Sena was about 3,500 strong and with 3,000 members in Gulbarga (started on June 13), 250 at Bidar (started on May 25) and about 100 in another village. The police had registered a case against these micreants who had disfigured the portraits of Hindu gods and burnt the scriptures. He also said before the Bhim Sena started some people had tarred the image of Hindu gods at Raichur also. Cases are being filed against all these people.' (*Deccan Herald*, Sept. 10, 1968.)

A spate of 'letters to editors' both welcoming and criticising the formation of Bhim Sena, appeared in the Press. One U. K. Balachandra said in the *Kannada Prabha* dated May 11, 1968 that having been looked down upon by the Vedic religion Harijans are fully justified in hitting back. If one looks on another with contempt and hatred, it is not unnatural if this attitude is reciprocated. When Harijans are not allowed inside the temples, why should they worship such a god? Why should they respect those holy scriptures which had assigned them the lowest sub-human status?

R. H. Kodihsahalli in a letter to *Kannada Prabha* said: 'The whole world is opposed to Harijans in Hindu India'. The press, platform, radio, TV, Government and wealth are in the hands of Brahmins. It is not the Harijans that are seeking separatism. They are kept separate by the brahminical Hindu religion.

K.S. Ramagopal from Bangalore in a 'letter' to *Prajavani*, wrote that the Bhim Sena was a dangerous force and must be put down mercilessly. Harijans are also Hindus, said M. Ramakrishna from Mandya, and called for an immediate ban on Bhim Sena and dubbed its activities as criminal and anti-national.

N. Seshadri writing in the *Indian Express* stated that the burning of Hindu gods has wounded the feelings of Hindus.

In an interview to a Bombay daily during his tour of Maharashtra, Shyam Sunder said he had 10,000 members in Andhra Pradesh alone. The total strength of the Bhim Sena was put at 2 lakhs, each member paying 10 paise a month as subscription. They were being given military training in self-defence by ex-servicemen. The Bhim Sena had its own constitution and flag. The district chairman was nominated by the President of the Bhim Sena. On the first Sunday of every month, the Bhim Sena leaders visited taluk headquarters and when caste Hindu atrocities occur the Bhim Sena provided the self-defence force. It had its own intelligence service, adult education team and a census service. The whole movement might have lasted just six or seven years but it virtually created a revolution in the minds of the Dalits to whom it gave new courage and confidence to fight back against caste Hindu fascist tendencies.

Revolutionaries like Shyam Sunder are seldom born in Hindu India. It is indeed a pity that society neither understands them properly nor gives them adequate recognition during their lifetime. In the peculiar situation of Hindu India caught between the forces of 'class' and 'caste', clinging between life and death, the crying need of the hour is for dauntless leaders like Shyam Sunder who can liberate this land from both these forces. But senseless as we are, we curse them when they live but worship them after they die.

CHAPTER II

BASAVALINGAPPA EPISODE

I. The Conspiracy

The 'Basavalingappa episode' is the story of the biggest ever witch-hunt in the history of Karnataka. It is also the story of B. Basavalingappa, the first Dalit leader, who created a political uproar in Karnataka at the latter end of 1973 which culminated in victory for the Hindu communalist forces and Basavalingappa's dismissal from the cabinet. It is also the sad revelation of the lack of progressive thinking and tolerance even among the educated caste Hindus of conservative Karnataka who deliberately made much ado about the utterances of the angry Dalit leader.

Events have since proved that Basavalingappa, the former Municipal Administration Minister, was right. Dr. K. V. Puttappa, Karnataka's topmost literary figure, has since come out in open support of the theory propounded by him. The very fact that there has been a spurt of progressive and rationalist thinking in different parts of Karnataka proves that the removal of Basavalingappa has brought about a new awakening of the youth, particularly the Dalits. Perhaps no other Minister in the country has generated so much 'controversy' and hatred from the entire group of upper caste Hindus who demanded nothing short of his head. They feared that if Basavalingappa continued in power he would disturb the social status quo, mercilessly exposing the carefully concealed lies built around religion and gods, whipping up the Dalits, who, awakened from their long slumber may take to violence, thus endangering the lives of the rural landed exploiters. Once the Dalits oppose the landed gentry the cheap labour for agricultural operations may not be so readily available because when the untouchables, who are at the very bottom of this social pyramid, attempt to free themselves there is every danger of the whole carefully built structure

collapsing. The one who stands at the apex of the pyramid will suffer the worst fracture in this collapse. Who is, therefore, prepared to risk this fall ?

The high castes thought that Basavalingappa's 'controversial' public utterances might trigger off a veritable 'caste war' disturbing the 'peace' of the society. Attuned to deceit and exploitation for centuries, some high castes were reluctant to countenance the upsetting of the carefully maintained peace and tranquility, by an untouchable of the Hindu society which was being kept fully doped under the influence of the 'karma' theory.

Some Jan Sangh and R.S.S. inclined Brahmins acted quickly with the thought that should Basavalingappa continue in power, he would hit at the very source of their bread and butter. Supported therefore, by some high caste journalists who had control of the press in Karnataka, weaving lie upon lie, they depicted him as a demon and forced him into one 'controversy' after another. They finally succeeded in their ingenious game of divide and rule by impressing upon the politically powerful landed-gentry, the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats, that Basavalingappa was out to destroy them also. The Brahmins let loose the dog and it obediently performed its time-honoured job.

Basavalingappa's declaration at the end of a speech that much of Kannada literature was nothing but *boosa* (cattlefeed) proved to be the last straw on the camel's back. The entire speech was twisted by a section of the press to whip up an excess of ill feeling. Strangely, the very same writers whose pride had been so quickly wounded by Basavalingappa's words remained unaffected by harsher criticism of their literature expressed by various eminent writers like C. Rajagopalachari, D. V. Gundappa, G. P. Rajaratnam, Gopalakrishna Adiga, T. T. Sharma and Dr. A. Ananthamurthy.

Months after Basavalingappa was dismissed, Dr. Puttappa came out in support of the '*boosa* theory'. Speaking on the '*boosa* controversy', he said : 'There was a big rumpus about a speech made by Basavalingappa alleging that all literature in Kannada is *boosa* (cattlefeed). There was even a shake-up

in the Ministry because of this (*boosa*) controversy. The speech had sparked off a big political crisis. But let me clarify ; what we call as *boosa* is found in every country's literature. Over three-fourth's is mostly '*boosa* Just because we call it *boosa*, it does not mean that we show disrespect to the authors. It is the duty of critics to point out what is good and what is bad in every piece of literature. . . . Now let us try to understand from what angle Basavalingappa made this criticism. He did it by keeping in mind the welfare of the untouchables. From this angle there is nothing much to boast of in Kannada literature '.¹

Puttappa's frank speech at Mysore exposing the 'hollowness' of Kannada literature and particularly the Madhwa philosophy was criticised by many high caste writers and their feelings were echoed in a statement issued by Pejawara Swamy, who heads the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, one of the R.S.S. outfits:

Bhadravati : Sri Vishweswartirtha Swamiji of the Pejavar Mutt, Udipi, on a visit here, has criticised the reported remarks by Dr. K. V. Puttappa on Kannada literature. In a statement, the Swamiji said : 'the statement made by Dr. K. V. Puttappa at a conference in Mysore on April 20 about Madhava Sahityahas pained us much. It is hard to believe that a man of his calibre could ever make such a statement and if so it is really unfortunate.

'It is a known fact that Sri Madhavacharya happened to be a frank and fearless soul, who propounded and promulgated progressive ideas about caste and the Chaturvarna system. Acharyas and saints like Purandara Dass, who followed him, criticised the useless dogmas in the then social life. They enriched the Sanskrit and Kannada literature by presenting a wholesome devotional literature which is applauded by all.

'A learned person, a former Vice-Chancellor of a renowned University and a poet-laureate who has himself advocated the importance of the noteworthy points of the literature of the good old past has unfortunately condemned the time-honoured literature like *Madhwa sahitya* by being blind towards the beautiful and saner points in it.'²

¹ Inaugural speech at the Karnataka Writers and Artists Vokkuta foundation Conference at Mysore City on April 20, 1974.

² *Deccan Herald*, April 25, 1974.

Well, the upper castes have the right to criticise a literature created only by themselves. It is they who created this 'literature' and called it 'literature'. But what right does an untouchable have to call it a *Bhoosa sahitya* (cattlefeed)? What an affront to the 'great' Kannada literature, which compared to other languages has not produced in the past thirty years even a single outstanding revolutionary poet, writer or thinker, barring Dr. Puttappa and a few lesser luminaries. This is because Kannada literature is kept out of the reach of the common man. Highly sanskritised, it concerned itself with non-issues without making man its central objective.

Although it was the Jan Sangh-R.S.S. that financed and engineered the anti-Basavalingappa agitation, once its objective in getting him dismissed was achieved, it also supported his *boosa* theory. What a shameless *volte face* ! *Rastrothana Vartha*, an organ of the Jan Sangh (published from Bangalore) admitted (six months after his removal) that Kannada literature is nothing but *boosa*. In its issue of July, 1974 it says that those who got enraged when Kannada literature was called *boosa* must remember that a celebrated Kannada scholar, who translated much of Kannada literature into English, himself called it *boosa*.

It quoted E.P. Rice as saying, 'I am afraid it must be confessed that Kanarese writers, highly skilful though they are in the manipulation of their language, and very pleasing to listen to in the original, have as yet contributed extremely little to the stock of the world's knowledge and inspiration . . . there is little of original and imperishable thought on the questions of perennial interest to men . . .'³

Thus Basavalingappa attained the distinction of becoming the first Minister in the entire country to be dismissed for his public utterances. Let it be remembered that he was not dismissed either for corruption or for inefficiency but for speaking the truth and calling a spade a spade. What a fantastic charge on which to remove a Minister !

³ *A History of Kanarese Literature*, p. 108.

What has the public to say about Basavalingappa? As a reporter, this writer had interviewed a number of political leaders, senior officers of the Karnataka Government, intellectuals and political leaders and many of them were all praise for the extraordinary dynamism of Basavalingappa who had the restlessness of a rebel. His head, they said, always used to bristle with schemes for the welfare of the untouchables and the backward classes. Even his worst enemies admitted that no other Minister in Karnataka had done so much for the untouchables. He was the first Minister in the country to abolish the age-old heinous system of carrying nightsoil as headloads. For the first time in the country's history he successfully implemented a scheme that was held so dear to the heart of Gandhi. He brought kudos to the Devraj Urs Government by distributing free sites to Dalits and other weaker sections and reserving houses built by the State Housing Board.

He made a comparatively minor portfolio, the municipal administration office, into a major department overnight, converting it virtually into a parallel Government, rescuing hundreds of civic bodies from the stranglehold of the land-owning dominant communities.

If these are his achievements what of his political backing and popularity? His worst enemies within the Congress Legislature Party admit that he was the most powerful Minister in the entire Devraj Urs Cabinet. He enjoyed the support of at least 20 scheduled caste and backward class M.L.A.s and also half a dozen Muslim legislators. The State Youth Congress led by D. B. Chandre Gowda, M.P., had pledged to carry out Basavalingappa's mission. There were at least three Ministers among his followers in the Cabinet. All the Muslim organisations in the State had protested against the removal of Basavalingappa. To the students and particularly the Dalit students he was their greatest hero. He had admirers even outside the party like J. H. Patel of the Socialist Party, C. M. Arumugham, Republican Party, Poosalingam, D.M.K. etc. In Tamil Nadu he used to draw big crowds and Chief Minister Karunanidhi presented him with a sword at a mammoth meeting.

His famous speeches had already been translated and printed in several languages. Some of the 'controversial' speeches were headlined in the press as 'Holiday for *ahimsa*', 'Truth is God', 'Kannada literature is cattlefeed', 'Gods to gutters', 'Don't believe newspapers', etc.

Basavalingappa was removed not because he lacked support in the party but because he was painted as a Brahmin-hater by a section of the press and this in turn antagonised the conservative Congress leaders at the Centre. In spite of this, some of his very best friends were Brahmins. He also had a host of admirers among the Brahmins, Vokkaligas, Lingayats and every progressive party. However, Chief Minister Devraj Urs, a champion of the down-trodden, had no other go but to listen to the dictates from Delhi thus appeasing the conservative elements which control the Congress Party in Delhi.

In any other country a person of the stature of Basavalingappa would have been rewarded for his bold, rational and scientific analysis of men and matters. But Hindu India thought it fit to destroy one of its proudest sons. Perhaps, his removal also proves that rationalism and scientific thinking are alien to the Hindu ethos.

The 'Basavalingappa episode' has also proved to what extent the non-violent seeming Hindus could become cruel and blood-thirsty. The Hindu society, which makes so much of *dharma*, does not tolerate persons who honestly differ from its dogmatic views. It does not offer even the elementary freedom of speech permitted under a democracy.

If one Minister can inaugurate a Ganapathi festival and exhort the people to pray, has not another Minister got the equal right to tell the people not to be deceived by the opiate of religion? Gandhi meant well when he called the untouchables Harijans since he wanted these lowly people to be treated as the 'children of god', but as G. N. Acharya says, (*Blitz*, Dec. 15, 1973) paying tribute to Basavalingappa: 'When they (untouchables) are treated as dirt, the use of the name smacks of blatant hypocrisy. The condescending privileged upper castes do not know the agony of the oppressed mind.' Having

kept them underfoot for thousands of years, if they retorted even once, it was found to be intolerable.

It was, after all, while addressing the Dalits that Basavalingappa had given the directive to throw the 'portraits of gods to gutters'. Why then should caste Hindus get angry? 'Perhaps, these people have some vested interest in God', a Bangalore University professor said, while thanking Basavalingappa for stirring up the biggest-ever rationalist storm in Karnataka. If not anything else, he added, the controversy, stirred up by Basavalingappa helped reveal some of the self-styled progressive writers in their true communalistic colours. In conservative Karnataka which was devoid of any virulent progressive movement—either Leftist movement, student movement, trade union movement, peasant movement, shudra movement, rationalist movement or even the Dalit movement—the 'Basavalingappa episode' came as the first welcome showers on parched, famished lands crying out for water.

The Basavalingappa episode also opened the eyes of the Dalit youths who then became the vanguard of the movement. Although later he failed to live up to their expectations because he suddenly become silent after his dismissal, Basavalingappa became a hero not only to the entire Dalit class but also to every other progressive section in the State. Therefore, to him goes the credit of triggering off the first Dalit revolt in Karnataka. Basavalingappa was instantly hailed as the 'Modern Basaveshwara', 'Ambedkar of South', and 'Periyar of Karnataka'. His residence in Kumara Park West attracted hundreds of untouchables, minority leaders and rationalist thinkers to whom he had become a hero. For the first time they found in Basavalingappa a leader to head this long delayed rationalist battle.

G. N. Acharya was the first journalist in the country to produce an objective analysis of the 'Basavalingappa episode' that led to a major cabinet crisis in Karnataka following the resignation of all the ministers and the consequent reshuffle. Writing under the headline, 'Crisis without a cause', Acharya, a Bombay-based Kannadiga, was surprised that a Minister was dismissed, not for violating party discipline, failure of administration, corrupt practices or abuse of power

but for certain 'provocative pronouncements', falling outside the ambit of his responsibility. Paying tribute to Basavalingappa's dynamism, Acharya also admitted his 'impatient temperament'. But this could be excused. A member of the long oppressed race of untouchables, he cannot be expected to behave like a smooth, suave, smiling business executive. 'Any one with imagination can understand the restlessness of a rebel stumped by the slow devious processes of administrative legalism,' Acharya said.

Basavalingappa hated the use of the word 'Harijan'. No doubt Gandhi meant well in coining this phrase 'children of God'. The Father of the Nation wanted the untouchables to be treated as 'children of God' but they are not treated as such by society. The Dalits are actually treated worse than dogs, says Basavalingappa.

What crimes did Basavalingappa commit? Even according to *Utthana* (March, 1974) and the *Rashthrothana Vartha* (July, 1974), mouthpiece of the R. S. S.-Jan Sangh, there is nothing wrong in his public statements and utterances. However, this shameless admission on the part of Hindu communal organisations came only after his dismissal and after they had achieved their goal of removing him from power. By heaping the worst of abuses on Basavalingappa, subjecting him to all sorts of humiliations and finally dismissing him from the Ministry, the caste Hindus may think they have achieved something great. But time alone will prove who is right and who is wrong. The very fact that the Jan Sangh-R.S.S. forces later admitted their folly and came out in support of Basavalingappa's remarks on Kannada literature proves that truth lies on the side of Basavalingappa.

It is really tragic that Basavalingappa had not even a soul among the top literary persons in Kannada to support him during the 'boosa controversy' and the voices of lesser luminaries were drowned in the noise of the wardrums that gripped the State. *Beechi*, a noted Kannada writer, who had earlier joined the anti-Basavalingappa cacophony, turned a somersault after a lapse of six months of Basavalingappa's ouster. The *Indian Express* of October 20, 1974

carried the following story headlined : ' Critic now backs Basavalingappa ' :

Bangalore : Beechi, the renowned Kannada writer, who it was that fired the first shot against Mr. B. Basavalingappa when, as a Minister of the State, he was involved in the *boosa* imbroglio, pleaded here today that he should be reinstated in the Cabinet.

Calling Basavalingappa a ' servant of liberal views ' at a news conference here, Beechi said his reinstatement would enable him to pursue the ' noble move ' to perpetuate the memory of Gandhiji by solid action.

Beechi pointed to Basavalingappa's efforts to restore human dignity to the scavengers by abolishing the pernicious habit of carrying headloads of human refuse. He also regretted that Basavalingappa's ' alleged ' comments about Kannada literature should have diverted the attention of the people from his achievements. The controversy raised by the statement was in no way related to his calibre as an administrator.

Asked how he could plead for Basavalingappa now after taking the lead in accusing him of outraging the feelings of Kannada lovers, Beechi said he had subsequently realized that Basavalingappa had been misquoted. In any case, this was too trivial a reason for anybody to be shunted out of a Ministry.

Similarly, U. R. Anantamurthy, a noted writer, extended a belated support after maintaining a discreet silence during the battle royal over the ' *bhoosa* controversy '. In a speech delivered at Mercara, he said : ' People should welcome criticisms from scheduled castes to liberate society consisting mostly of lower classes.'⁴ Defending Basavalingappa's remark on Kannada literature, he said, ' Basavalingappa had a right to criticise and what he had said about Kannada literature was right '.

II. Role of Pressmen

Perhaps no other section has done greater harm to Basavalingappa and in turn to the Dalit cause than journalists—particularly the reporters among them. Basavalingappa was one of the victims mercilessly felled by the misuses of the power of the pen. The role of the Press during the Basavalingappa episode is something that will make any fair-minded person

⁴ *Deccan Herald*, Dec. 3, 1973.

hang his head in shame. To what extent the pressmen were blood-thirsty was proved by the way they built up tensions, wove stories around him, painted him as an evil genius out to destroy the society, deliberately misrepresented his speeches and finally committed the most sordid and cold-blooded assassination in the history of Kannada journalism.

Barring a handful, the entire tribe of reporters in Bangalore took a sadistic pleasure in this mayhem. They turned into grave-diggers and thought it their duty to bury him politically. 'Letters to the Editor' were manufactured right inside newspaper offices and published under assumed names, statements were sought from unwilling persons and 'Dharma Rakshaka Samitis' formed under the patronage of pressmen. False reports were published blatantly while those supporting Basavalingappa were hounded out and those published were twisted out of recognition. An editor used his column day after day to denigrate Basavalingappa who was not even given a chance to defend himself. He was hanged without a trial. That does not mean that there were no fair-minded people among the pressmen. But such of them who maintained silence fearing a fascist upsurge and those who made bold to come out in support of the reasons behind Basavalingappa's logic were dubbed 'anti-Brahmin'. Reasoning took a holiday, as prejudice started riding roughshod.

No one can measure the depth of this journalistic stab better than the victim himself. Addressing a meeting at Mysore University on Nov. 19, 1973 before his ouster, he painfully noted that journalists were crying out for his blood. He named *Prajavani*, the largest circulated Kannada daily published from Bangalore, and said that the pressmen manning it had violated all norms of journalistic conduct—if there were any. 'We have in this country some people who through books and newspapers and journals impose their views on others. Perhaps in the whole country, their total number may come to 5,000. And they set standards and tell others how to behave. These 5,000 people control your thoughts and make you dance like monkeys. Take any newspaper in the country, only 10-15 journalists regularly write in it and they give free advice to others without following

it. These people who use their pen to earn their livelihood need not teach us how to behave. We do not need them.’⁵

One can imagine the intensity of feeling and pain behind these words and to what extent he must have suffered at the hands of the pressmen is revealed through them. The role of pressmen in the ‘Basavalingappa episode’ must have come as a rude shock to him since he never expected this ‘stab in the back’ after they had bagged the best of benefits from him. ‘In fact it was the Brahmins under the guise of “economically weaker sections” and the pressmen who secured the maximum help from me,’ he said in an interview to this writer.

The very first work he undertook after becoming the Municipal Administration Minister was to grant house sites to a major section of journalists of Bangalore. This he did despite stiff opposition from various quarters including the Trust Board. Some other journalists who did him the worst damage were ironically his ‘most favoured lot’. He gave them houses from the State Housing Board under his charge. They praised him to his face and stabbed him in the back. This is the black role of the press in the ‘Basavalingappa episode’.

The adoption of this sordid role by the journalists should come as a warning to anybody engaged in a progressive cause. Why is Karnataka starved of progressive thinking? Why does nothing grow in Karnataka while in all the four neighbouring States big strides have been made in promoting progressive causes? If anybody tries to examine this dispassionately, a part of the blame has to be pinned on the Press which in Karnataka stands like a banyan tree and under which nothing grows. The Press in Karnataka, as in the rest of the country has become an unholy alliance of ‘class’ and ‘caste’ interests. The proprietors representing the business class are interested only in profits without ethics. And the journalists manning it, representing the ‘caste’ interests are charged with the task of upholding their unscrupulous ways. Both subserve each other’s interest in perfect co-ordination and harmony and so far there is no exception to this rule in the functioning of the

⁵ *Kannada Prabha*, Nov. 21, 1973.

Press in Karnataka. And in the face of this well-knit, well-oiled joint front, those who fight for progressive causes are thwarted lest they grow and jeopardise these twin forces that are the bane of the country.

III. 'Controversial' Speeches

How did Basavalingappa become a red rag to the Press and the public of Karnataka? What made him the most 'controversial' Minister? If anybody tries to make a dispassionate analysis of these facts and the succession of events that finally led to his dismissal, the only fault cited against him was his 'abrasive tongue'. As one sympathetic pressman put it: 'He had a good heart but a bad tongue.' What does this mean? What is the crime that he has committed either against the party (Congress) that he represented or the Government post that he held? So far, nobody has made any honest attempt to trace the successive events that look like a well laid out conspiracy. Not that it was carefully planned and executed by anybody. It built up into a crescendo and automatically became part of that historic game for which Hindu India is notoriously famous. The upper castes could never stomach any affront made to their cherished values by one of a lower caste—that too an untouchable. Even if judgement can be publicly pronounced on certain values, it can be done only by an upper caste man. And a 'Dalit' has no right but to do and die without questioning what and why. This was the 'sin' of Basavalingappa. A careful examination of his different so-called 'controversial' pronouncements will only prove that there was nothing wrong in what he spoke. They were repetitions of certain well-known historical truths. What he had said was already part of this country's sordid history. Dr. Ambedkar had said it, Buddha had said it, and Vivekananda had said it. Basavanna had repeated it many times. Gandhi too had reiterated it. M. N. Roy had written about it. So also had Jawaharlal Nehru, Lohia, and many others. Basavalingappa had just repeated them and the Press highlighted them—not to bring him glory but to lead him from one 'controversy' to another and finally to behead him.

Let us examine some of his 'controversial' speeches as reported extensively in the Press.

Truth is not God

The Deccan Herald of Feb. 8, 1973, had the following report headlined: 'The Static Hindu Society.'

Mysore : Municipal Administration Minister Basavalingappa here today asked the youth to completely change the 'static Hindu' society and make it as dynamic as Islam and Christianity, capable of adapting itself to the changing needs of time. Delivering a special lecture on 'Economics of Religion', arranged by the Mysore University Prasara, the Minister said if the static condition of Hindu society was not changed there would be no future for the society.

In his 65 minute speech, the Minister said that even Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for whom he had high regard did not do anything to break this tradition-bound static Hindu society. If they had attempted to do so and succeeded, India's story would have been different. While Nehru had the feeling that he belonged to a 'high caste' Gandhiji said: truth is God. Truth should be dynamic and should remove inequalities. But the tradition-bound Hindu society, where the people belonging to the so-called high castes treat the low castes worse than slaves, was far from Gandhiji's conception of truth. The static nature of society should have been shaken and new dynamism given to it.

The Minister said unlike Christianity and Islam, there were no founders of Hinduism. True, *Manthadipathies* started institutions with great ideals but those ideals died with them. What was left today was a 'dead past'. He said, while in Islam and Christianity the high and low mixed at the same social level, we have in Hinduism a high and a low caste. These differences were being tolerated for ages. Hinduism was a pool of standing waters where there was no scope for change and where all kinds of germs had their birth. When we think of shaking this static condition strong forces raise their ugly heads. Thus, we have come to preserve this static nature of the Hindu society.

Demanding what we have done to remove the differences in Hindu society, the Minister added that one could go into the villages today and see the same caste feelings as existed 1,000 years ago. 'The pursuit of casteism had become profitable'. Therefore the people were attached to the castes. They enjoyed fruits by attaching themselves to one caste or the other.

Some sections of Hindus treat other Hindus as slaves and exploit them to the maximum even today. This was a great distortion of Dharma. If power and financial resources were taken away from religious maths and swamijis there would be no

incentive to associate with these maths. By virtue of their association with these maths they could claim vast resources and exploit the masses.

The Rajas and general public had contributed to the riches of these maths. 'If pursuit of casteism, worshipping of God, and considerations of high caste were not profitable, the people would give up those pursuits.'

Today what one found was that 'money consideration' formed the basis of their Dharma. Even 50 years later the same static conditions would continue if we did not make attempts to change. Even after 25 years of independence, a 'Madiga remains a Madiga and a Lingayat remains a Lingayat'. His appeal to the youth was to 'dynamite' this static Hindu society and build a new one. The thousand-year conviction about caste system and Hindu society was still being nurtured and preserved. This should go and there should be fresh thinking to make the Hindu society an ever pulsating dynamic one.

This Mysore speech of Basavalingappa's was interpreted as an 'attack on Gandhi' and the Press ran a series of letters attacking 'Basavalingappa's affront to the Father of the Nation'. The enemies of Basavalingappa (who had already become a powerful Minister and had launched a number of schemes for the Dalits), both inside the cabinet and the Congress Legislature Party soon exploited the situation ruthlessly, fully aided by the Press. A number of sensation-mongers of the Congress Party snatched at this 'slur on Gandhi' which finally ended in a 'life and death question'. The Congress Legislature Party had a 'crisis session' on March 14, 1973 and the Bangalore Press using words which seemed calculated to inflame, reported that the 'controversy raging in the State over the interpretation of certain thoughts of Gandhiji by Municipal Administration Minister Basavalingappa exploded at a meeting of the Legislature Congress Party this morning and without passing a formal resolution, the party made its resentment over the Minister's stance, amply clear.'⁶

God, Religion and Castes

Indian Express reporting from Walajapet, September 25, 1973, said : Mysore Municipal Administration Minister has

⁶ *Indian Express*, March 14, 1973.

strongly condemned the 'exploitation' of backward class people by the 'so-called higher classes' in Hindu society in the name of God, religion and castes. Presiding over the birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, he appealed to scheduled castes to give up all those age-old Hindu practices, including the worship of photographs, for ten years and lead their own lives. 'Then you will become a militant man, free from slavery and exploitation', he added.

Report in the *Organiser*

According to a report in the Jan Sangh-R.S.S. mouthpiece, *Organiser*, Basavalingappa while addressing Dalit youths of Bagalkot is reported to have asked them to rape Brahmin girls. This fantastic report was surprisingly published not in any of the newspapers in Karnataka, but in the *Organiser* published from far off New Delhi in its issue dated September 16, 1972.

This was the most 'controversial speech' of Basavalingappa's and it led to a series of court litigations against him producing a spate of 'letters' and minor agitations. Hathayogi, L. S. Rao of the 'walk-on-the-water-and-then-sink fame', was the first to kick up a big row 'injured' by the 'slur' on his community. Local newspapers gave lengthy coverage to Hathayogi's Press Conference and also to a fake handbill purported to have been given to Chief Minister Devraj Urs on behalf of the 'Brahmin Taruna Sangha' of Bagalkot. The 'strongly worded' handbill urged Urs to 'sack' Basavalingappa for 'spreading this poison'.

Basavalingappa told the second additional sessions Court, Gulbarga, that the allegations against him were false and were made with an ulterior motive to bring down his public image. *Deccan Herald* correspondent reporting the Court proceedings from Gulbarga said :

Gulbarga : He also did not subscribe to the views expressed in the memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister by a 'section of the individuals' at Aland, the Minister said. He said his friends, colleagues and supporters were surprised at the reported allegations published in *Organiser* an English weekly from Delhi, stating that he (Basavalingappa) had exhorted a Harijan audience 'not to leave the Brahmin girl or woman

unmolested'. He explained the imputations levelled against him in the columns of that weekly and asked them to judge for themselves about its veracity.

If he had not contradicted the contents of the memorandum or the report of the Delhi weekly, it was because he wanted the Chief Minister to prosecute those who had made the allegations, Basavalingappa said.

On cross-examination, Basavalingappa said the Chief Minister who received the memorandum made it available to him after one month. The Government had taken a decision to file cases against those who had made the allegations against him (the Municipal Administration Minister). The Cabinet did not discuss the subject nor did any Minister raise the subject at Cabinet meetings.

The Karnataka Government later filed cases against K.R. Malkani, editor of the *Organiser* and against several others for this report that allegedly defamed Basavalingappa. The cases are still pending in three courts of Karnataka. Basavalingappa has vowed to fight out the case to vindicate his stand and establish the truth.

Whatever may be the final court verdict, the *Organiser* report has done irreparable damage to Basavalingappa. The Press in Karnataka never bothered to probe the mystery behind this report emanating from New Delhi and place the truth before its readers. While Basavalingappa maintained that he had never visited Bagalkot and never made any such speech, the Press on its own passed the sentence of death on Basavalingappa and hanged him even before the law courts were to come out with their pronouncements. What a comment on the country's 'free Press' !

Suspend Ahimsa

The following report appeared in *Times of India*, July 8, 1973 :

Bangalore : Mysore's Minister for Municipal Administration Mr. Basavalingappa who had earlier asked Harijans to declare a ten-year 'moratorium' on the worship of Hindu gods, has now asked them for a similar suspension of the principle of 'ahimsa' (non-violence).

He said at a civic reception accorded him at Gadag-Batageri recently that non-violence was being advanced by the 'exploiters'

in order to divert the attention of the 'exploited'. The 'exploited' might take to violent methods to end the age-long economic injustice and social disabilities.

Mr. Basavalingappa's remarks have caused a stir in orthodox Congress and even Opposition circles.

This speech added fuel to fire and opposition parties, ever ready to exploit any situation to further their ends, fully made use of this speech. The following reaction indicates the controversy generated by the speech :

Bangalore : The leader of the Opposition in the Mysore Legislative Assembly, Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda, has criticised the reported statement of the Municipal Administration Minister Mr. Basavalingappa, calling on Harijans to give up worshipping Hindu gods.

In a statement issued today Mr. Gowda wanted to know whether the recent attacks of Mr. Basavalingappa on Gandhi had the approval of the members of the State Cabinet. If such an approval has not been given, the Minister should be dismissed from the Cabinet forthwith for his reported 'derogatory' remarks. Mr. Gowda expressed his surprise at the 'inability' of the Chief Minister to restrain Mr. Basavalingappa from making public utterances wounding the feelings of a certain section of the people. He warned that the Opposition in the State would be forced to launch an agitation if the Minister was not restrained from making 'derogatory' remarks on Hindu religion and Gods.⁷

The Jan Sangh and R.S.S., which have been spearheading the attack on Basavalingappa dragged the issue to the legislature where an adjournment motion sponsored by Mallur Ananda Rao created a State-wide sensation. The Jan Sangh member's Motion pertained to Basavalingappa's alleged speech at Shimoga 'denigrating' the Vedas, Upanishads and Geeta. The issue sparked off a major clash in the Legislative Council on Oct. 21, 1973 between Mallur Ananda Rao and Basavalingappa who in a moving speech said : 'If Mallur Ananda Rao can become so infuriated when I asked the Dalits to throw their scripture into the gutters, how furious we untouchables should be for having been exploited by you for thousands of years and being reduced to this position. Are there not people even today rejoicing over our carrying Mallur Ananda Rao's shit

⁷ *Hindu*, July 2, 1973.

on our heads for thousands of years ?' Basavalingappa added among uproarious scenes in the house. 'I am a student of social science. I am doing my humble bit to remove the inequalities in the societies created by the caste system. But Mallur has threatened to shoot me down. I am not afraid of these threats but my fear is that these thousands of my followers angered by this threat might eat Mallur's raw flesh. That is why I warn you, don't provoke the Dalits, you won't be safe'.⁸

Barring one socialist member, Shri Y.R. Parameswarappa, none came to Basavalingappa's support during the historic acrimonious battle that rocked the Legislative Council.

Gods to Gutters

The following report appeared in *Viduthalai*, a Tamil daily, on April 27, 1973 :

Mysore : 'People who are untouchables must give up the practice of keeping the photos of Hindu gods in their houses. These photos must be consigned to garrets where one dumps useless things or thrown away into gutters,' Mr. Basavalingappa said here today unveiling a portrait of Dr. Ambedkar.

'Brothers of the down-trodden communities, what benefits have you derived from worshipping photos of Hindu gods in your homes for the last 5,000 years? Have these photos helped you to get out of your huts and dwell in decent houses? The photos that ought to adorn the walls of your houses are those of Dr. Ambedkar and I shall get them printed and will distribute them free of cost. After you get Dr. Ambedkar's photos you can discard the photos of Hindu gods.

'Bundle them all and throw them into places meant for keeping useless things. If you don't have space, throw them into drains or gutters or into wells.

'When I say this, I know it will be described as harsh words, but I use these harsh words to kindle the feelings of the people suppressed for thousands of years.'⁹

Amid this cacophony of one-sided statements which appeared in the communal press of Karnataka, the voice of

⁸ *Prajavani*, Oct. 21, 1973.

⁹ Translated from *Viduthalai*, a Tamil Daily, April 27, 1973.

reason was drowned. The Press also ignored statements supporting Basavalingappa since they did not suit its interests. A statement issued by the late P. Kodanda Rao, President of the Servants of India Society and a highly respected figure, was one such voice drowned in the din and bustle caused by the 'Basavalingappa episode'. His statements at last appeared as a 'letter to the editor' while anti-Basavalingappa statements appeared in news columns under prominent headlines. Kodanda Rao's letter said: 'Sir, The critics of Mr. Basavalingappa's attacks on the caste system among Hindus, which claims sanction of Hindu gods and sacred texts and of Mahatmas and Matadhipathis, will do well to put themselves in his place and realise how they would feel. When a member of the Depressed Classes who have been treated with contempt for centuries, realises the injustice of the system and flares up and uses strong language in criticising those who, whatever they may say, upheld the caste hierarchy in practice, it is less than what the caste people deserve. Indeed, the caste system, with its hierarchy of status based upon the accident of birth which nobody could help, is an abomination which cannot be condemned too strongly. Those in the 'higher castes' who do not feel the degradation of the 'lower castes' should have patience with those who suffer such degradation and must accept criticisms meant to shock them.'¹⁰

H. S. Doreswamy, one of the few Gandhians who still retains some rational thoughts in a letter in *Prajavani* (July 8, 1973) asked these critics of Basavalingappa to do some honest heart-searching. 'Why don't you examine the exploitation going on in the name of gods, religion, temples and gurus. In fact, Basavalingappa appeared at the right time to save the State from the moral and spiritual degeneration that is eating into our vitals. It is really a tragedy that our people, instead of understanding him properly, are trying to misinterpret him to further their corrupt, narrow, communal ends. Whatever Basavalingappa said on the Hindu religion is nothing but the truth and one has only to open one's eyes to be convinced.

¹⁰ *Deccan Herald*, June 23, 1973.

Those who are now worried about the fate of the Hindu religion cannot rescue it by attacking Basavalingappa. In fact those who hate Basavalingappa and heap abuses on him are not real Hindus,' he said.

Three progressive Kannada writers, (two of whom are Vokkaligas) also issued a statement supporting Basavalingappa. K.P. Purnachandra Tejaswi, Kale Gowda Nagawara and M.D. Nanjundaswamy in their 'letter' denounced Nanje Gowda and Ramakrishna Hegde, Opposition leader in the Legislative Council, and pointed out that Basavalingappa 'had every right to propagate atheism. When Governor Sukhadia ordered the Government to observe Mahavir Jayanti in a big way he did it in his official capacity. When Devraj Urs was seen in newspaper pictures folding hands in reverence before the cruel ritual of breaking coconuts on heads in a temple, he did it as Chief Minister. Nanje Gowda said that the Congress had not officially accepted atheism as the party policy. If that is the case we would like to know what is the official policy of the party. If the Governor and the Chief Minister had the right to propagate theism, a Minister has equal rights to advocate atheism.'¹¹

Pejawara Swamy was one of the religious leaders who fanned the flames of anti-Basavalingappa fire although he claimed to be one of those interested in 'Harijan uplift'. The Swamiji entered into a controversy with Basavalingappa who retaliated with vehemence finally exposing the hollowness of this 'Harijan uplift'. Basavalingappa bluntly said that Swamiji was essentially a communalist believing in caste hierarchy and as such did not have the right to speak for Harijans whom he did not allow inside the Udupi temple. He asked, 'How could the Swamiji practice untouchability if he felt so much love for Harijans?' The Harijans were the worst victims of the caste system socially, economically and morally, he added. Anybody trying to do 'Harijan uplift' must first denounce the caste system which is the bedrock on which Hinduism stands. This statement of Basavalingappa finally silenced the Pejawara

¹¹ *Kannada Prabha*, May 10, 1973.

Swamy who later wrote a letter apologising for all the previous statements he had made and urged him to end the controversy. From then onwards Pejawara Swamy was out of the picture.

IV. Student Agitation

An important aspect of the 'Basavalingappa episode' is that it culminated in a state-wide student agitation that erupted in almost every district headquarter and even in small towns. No doubt, the forces opposing Basavalingappa were in the majority since they all belonged to the upper castes. They had better financial backing and organisational support from the rightists and communalist political parties besides the blessings of the heads of educational institutions. The police too turned a blind eye to this agitation. As for press coverage of the anti-Basavalingappa agitation there was no need to ask for it. Exaggerated reports fully embellished with photographs, were splashed on the front pages of all the newspapers in Karnataka.

In contrast to this the pro-Basavalingappa counter-agitation presented a poor show. The Dalit students did put up a good demonstration and in this they at first got some effective support from certain caste Hindu students and teachers as well. As a spontaneous upsurge it became the very first protest offered by the Dalit students on a State-wide scale. Although the rival student groups were divided purely on a communal basis there was a tinge of ideological colour in it too. The Dalit students who were singled out and beaten up by the caste Hindu boys, for the first time, had an opportunity to think of the reasons for their degradation and deprivation. They held group meetings in hostels, under the trees, and in hotels to debate the caste system, untouchability, the different speeches of Basavalingappa and the thoughts of Ambedkar. They also discussed where the Dalits stood after thirty years of doles given out by the Government. In these group meetings there used to be serious debates on the merits of Marxian philosophy and what the Leftist parties did for the Dalits. The agitation and the blows they received from the caste Hindus awoke them from their deep slumber. Even the college-going Dalit students were not aware till then of the force of Dalit power. But when

they felt the force of the power they realised that their day of deliverance was nearing and they were ready to fight for it. It was for this reason that Dalit youth all over Karnataka were grateful to Basavalingappa for stirring up the fiercest ever Dalit battle in the history of modern Karnataka.

While minor clashes were going on in the towns, the newspapers exaggerated the incidents and said : ' Violence exploded on a major scale in Bangalore '. The rival student groups clashed in Bangalore for the second day (Nov. 24, 1973) in front of the Government colleges and some exchanged blows. In the first fight, cycle chains and other weapons were freely used. Several students, mostly Dalits, were injured. The student groups stoned passing buses and some were damaged. The fact was that it was only a handful who created the trouble.

On November 26, the anti-Basavalingappa student group took out a bigger procession in Bangalore and burnt a Basavalingappa effigy before the Vidhana Soudha. Newspapers vied with each other in giving publicity to this agitation. Reports said that students of different colleges in the city and also the suburbs participated in the demonstration. Those from the suburban colleges came walking all the way to Cubbon Park (opposite the Vidhana Soudha) to participate in it, one Daily said, and added, that by noon a big gathering converged at Cubbon Park, complete with two donkeys garlanded with old chappals. The donkeys had Basavalingappa's name on them in bold letters. A big effigy of Basavalingappa was also garlanded with chappals. Student leaders made short speeches before the effigy was burnt. There was singing, dancing and drum-beating as the effigy was burnt. Speakers asked students to abstain from classes and the crowd rushed to Basavalingappa's residence, a furlong away. The jubilant crowd threw chappals at Basavalingappa's residence and let loose the donkeys into his compound. From there, the biosterous crowd entered a girls' college next door, along with the donkeys and asked the lady students to join the agitation. It is to be noted that there was hardly any police intervention until this stage and press reports said that the police came on the scene only when the student group entered the girls' college.

Meanwhile, the pro-Basavalingappa group also took out a procession to Cubbon Park but this time the police did not allow them to enter the Park. The police advised them to disperse and press reports said the students heeded the advice and peacefully dispersed.

The Press also carried a statement from the Anti-Basavalingappa 'Student Action Committee' saying that a student by the name of Gururaj was prevented from self-immolation when he attempted to jump into the fire after the Minister's effigy was burnt in Cubbon Park. The statement said the student *dharna* would continue every day until the Minister was dismissed. Running into a column, it was given front page publicity in all the newspapers in the Bangalore Press. It said the Committee would present Basavalingappa a bag of cattle feed to symbolise the students' protest against him for dubbing modern Kannada literature, cattlefeed. Newspapers also carried columns of news about anti-Basavalingappa agitations staged in mofussil centres.

Mysore :

About 2,000 students from various colleges took out a procession along with a donkey and a dog bearing the names of the Chief Minister and Basavalingappa respectively. After burning Basavalingappa's effigy they stopped buses and autos and wrote anti-Basavalingappa slogans on them. On November 28, rival student groups clashed in the heart of the city forcing the police to resort to lathi-charge and arrest students. 'Students supporting Basavalingappa shouted pro-Basavalingappa slogans and also slogans against *Prajavani*, Vice-Chancellor Javare Gowda of Mysore University and Kannada writer 'Beechi'. Student demonstrators then came before the local offices of the *Deccan Herald* and *Prajavani* and shouted slogans denouncing the policies of these papers. Later, they also burnt copies of these papers.'¹²

The report said both the groups were armed with lathis. All the colleges remained closed. In the stone-throwing one student was injured. The following are some of the press reports of anti and pro agitations in Karnataka at that time :

Davangere :

Over 1,000 local students took out a big procession denouncing Basavalingappa's disparaging remarks against Kannada litera-

¹² *Prajavani*, November 29, 1973.

ture. A number of local leaders also joined the procession which ended after burning Basavalingappa's effigy and demanding his resignation. All the merchants voluntarily closed their shops as a mark of protest. (*Kannada Prabha*, November 29, 1973).

Belgaum :

The local Lingaraj College students today observed hartal (*Samyukta Karnataka*, November 28, 1973).

Gulbarga :

Section 144 was clamped in the city following attempts by pro-Basavalingappa students to set fire to Government buses. All the buses have been cancelled. Schools and Colleges were closed down for a week to avoid further trouble.

Shimoga :

The local unit of the Hindu Maha Sabha demanded the dismissal of Basavalingappa for 'abusing Hindu gods and religion'.

Gadag :

About 350 municipal sweepers of the Gadag-Batageri have applied for leave to protest against Basavalingappa's resignation. They also threatened to stop cleaning the city.

Bidar :

Scheduled caste and tribe students went in a procession to the D.C. office denouncing Chief Minister Devraj Urs, other Ministers particularly K. H. Patil and Opposition leader, Deve Gowda.¹³

Bangalore :

Sword Presented to Basavalingappa :

Municipal Administration Minister Basavalingappa was presented with a 'sword' here today to 'destroy the wretched caste system operating in Hindu society and usher in an egalitarian society'. Presentation of the sword was made by Mr. C. P. Chittarasu, Chairman, Tamilnadu Legislature Council at a function organised by the admirers to felicitate Mr. Basavalingappa on his 50th birthday. Messrs. E. V. K. Sampath of Tamilnadu, C. M. Arumugham and D. Poosalingam, M.L.A.s of Mysore, and others who spoke hailed Mr. Basavalingappa as the 'Lion of Karnataka roaring against religious bigotry.'

¹³ *Deccan Herald*, January 12, 1974.

They saw in him a 'hero of the downtrodden, determined to liberate the oppressed people'.

Prof. Nandjundaswamy, who presided, praised the courage of conviction of Mr. Basavalingappa and hoped he would revive the social revolution started by Basaveshwara 800 years ago. All the speakers expressed their thrill at the recent statement of Mr. Basavalingappa asking the weaker sections to throw the picture of 'gods to gutters'. Their admiration for him was immense because he took up a social cause unmindful of the violent reaction of the orthodoxy.¹⁴

Mysore :

Mr. N. C. Sanjeevan, President of the Dr. Ambedkar School of Thought, here today described Municipal Administration Minister, B. Basavalingappa as Bismarck of the Scheduled Castes.

Addressing the Scheduled Caste students of Mysore University, Mr. Sanjeevan said that just as Bismarck aroused in Germans scattered in different regions a spirit of unity, Mr. Basavalingappa had contributed to the cause of the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes.

Mr. Sanjeevan said the agitation launched by a section of students against the Minister had served to consolidate the forces of the oppressed.

He alleged that the agitation against Mr. Basavalingappa was against the Scheduled Castes.¹⁵

Chintamani :

Over 100 local Dalit students in a statement issued here today expressed regret that even after Basavalingappa had clarified his recent remarks on Kannada literature, some interested parties were carrying on agitations demanding his removal. Dalit students and other caste Hindu students who had heard Basavalingappa had already issued statements saying that Basavalingappa never meant any disrespect to Kannada literature. Even then these people have no courtesy to accept this clarification. Barring some 'Vachanakaars', Kannada literature has nothing in it that reflects the wishes and aspirations of Harijans who are exploited for thousands of years by the hands of caste Hindus. How can such a thing be considered as literature by the Harijans?¹⁶

¹⁴ *Indian Express*, May 6, 1973.

¹⁵ *Indian Express*, Dec. 5, 1973.

¹⁶ *Kannada Prabha*, Dec. 1, 1973.

The clash between rival groups took a violent turn on Nov. 30, resulting in injuries to four students. Two persons were arrested. There was an attempt to set fire to a city bus near the Central College and another bus was damaged by stone-throwing. Meanwhile, the Police Commissioner had clamped a ban order on the city for seven days prohibiting processions and meetings. This was the fifth day of the student agitation against Basavalingappa. The pro-Basavalingappa student group which took out a procession near the Mysore Bank was stoned. Several colleges were closed. Nagabhushana Aradhya, President of the 'Student Action Committee' that was conducting the anti-Basavalingappa agitation, said the agitation would continue until Basavalingappa was dismissed, and that relay fasts by students would be a daily feature. At the same time a rival group also commenced a counter-fast to support Basavalingappa's stand.¹⁷

Bangalore :

The police today arrested 99 students who defied the ban order. Anti-Basavalingappa students defied the ban order at three places in the city and courted arrests. Because of the student agitations, city colleges have been closed. There were also reports of stone-throwing on buses.¹⁸

As the student agitation reached a climax a self-appointed 'Citizens' Peace Committee' came into being with Kadidal Manjappa, a former Chief Minister and a Vokkaliga, as chairman. Barring a lady educationist belonging to the Scheduled caste, the Committee was heavily loaded with anti-Basavalingappa elements. Instead of persuading the students to call off their agitation the Peace Committee started indulging in politics by going into the merits of Basavalingappa's 'Boosa speech'.

It is to be noted that an important aspect of the anti-Basavalingappa incident was deliberately blacked out by the Press. All news of the flight of Dalit students to their respective villages to escape from the caste Hindu tyranny was

¹⁷ *Prajavani*, December 1, 1973.

¹⁸ *Kannada Prabha*, December 4, 1973.

deliberately suppressed. Thousands of Dalit students in Government University Hostels and other hostels, fled to their villages after some of them were beaten up in the college grounds and hostel premises in Bangalore, Mysore, Dharwar, Gulbarga and other centres. Though scheduled caste Ministers and legislators received a spate of complaints all of them were helpless since they themselves were reeling under the fascist upsurge sweeping the State.

V. Cabinet Crisis

The student agitation and the massive front-page press coverage given to it converted the 'Basavalingappa episode' into one of the biggest political crises in the history of Karnataka after the Congress split. With the entire caste Hindu forces in the State arrayed against Basavalingappa, his dismissal from the Devraj Urs ministry became a certainty.

While Basavalingappa was away in Delhi clarifying his stand to Central leaders, his colleagues, at a dramatic midnight cabinet meeting on December 5, 1973 tendered their resignation en-bloc to force his exit. Chief Minister Devraj Urs to whom Basavalingappa was a tower of strength received the resignation letters of ten Ministers and later gave out the shocking news to the reporters waiting outside the Cabinet room. While a majority of the reporters received the news with great relief some of them at least were literally shocked. Mr. Urs told newsmen that in view of the prevailing student unrest in Karnataka over Basavalingappa's utterances against Kannada literature the Ministers thought that this was the best way to bring peace. The resignations proved that all the colleagues were with him, Mr. Urs said. Political circles said if only Basavalingappa was present at this midnight cabinet meeting, his colleagues would not have resorted to this extreme step. Besides, he would have had a chance to explain and argue his case.

Basavalingappa on arrival from Delhi on Dec. 17 issued a statement explaining his position. At a crowded press conference at his residence he said he was the happiest man alive. There was no parallel instance in history when a Minister

went out of office as a price for expressing frank opinions on 'academic subjects governing the society'. He hit out at his critics particularly in the Press who had been thoroughly uncharitable to him in the assessment of the 'mission' of his life. He also attacked those who were interested in maintaining the status quo in society who had gone to the extent of accusing him of nursing a pathological hatred for Brahmins and setting up one community against the other. He pointed out that from the very beginning of his legal career, all his close friends were Brahmins. In fact, he did not go to any non-Brahmin lawyers even for his apprenticeship. Even to this day, he said, all his close movements were only with Brahmins. He did not recognise anybody on the basis of caste or community. Asked about his future plans, Basavalingappa said that he would continue his mission in a better and more effective manner. 'It is more precious and dear to my heart than any position'. 'At the moment the reactionary and communal elements may rejoice over my exit and may feel that they have succeeded in their long-awaited wish but the victory they have achieved is only pyrrhic'. He considered his exit as the beginning of the real Dalit movement in Karnataka aimed at liberating the down-trodden from the clutches of the dead past.

The dismissal of Basavalingappa shocked into immediate action the Dalits who had been in deep slumber. Their spontaneous expressions of feeling on the day of his arrival after the dismissal had to be seen to be believed. The sprawling compound of Basavalingappa's official residence was literally besieged and Basavalingappa was buried in cartloads of garlands. Never in the history of Karnataka had a dismissed Minister received such an ovation. It was a tumultuous scene. Plants and flower pots in the compound were trampled upon in the stampede and there was a surge of people all around. Legislators, congressmen, student leaders of all communities, a number of Muslim leaders and even officials went to express their solidarity. Some people were literally in tears on hearing the news that a leader who stood for a great cause and who did so much for the Dalits and weaker sections should be so unceremoniously dismissed,

and that a dynamic political career should come to such an abrupt end because a handful of students held the city to ransom. But Basavalingappa was in good cheer. He said it was a day of deliverance. He was now free to carry on his mission without the ministerial shackle that bound him head and foot. He could work for the Dalit cause with redoubled energy.

To what extent the country's Dalits respected him was proved by an angry resolution passed by the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra. Anil Kamble, a Panther leader of Poona, in a letter to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said that the Dalit Panthers were taking a serious view of the removal of Shri Basavalingappa, Karnataka Minister for Municipal Administration and Housing, that it was nothing but a communal action and a bid to crush the Dalits. The letter said : ' Therefore, Dalit Panthers, taking a serious view of these incidents, pass the following resolutions :

(1) Shri Devaraj Urs should be immediately removed for having banned the freedom of Shri Basavalingappa.

(2) Shri Basavalingappa should immediately be taken back into the State Cabinet.

(3) Judicial enquiry should be conducted into the atrocities committed against the backward communities by appointing a Committee and the guilty should be punished.

Otherwise : "Dalit Panthers" will enter into Gulbarga in thousands and they will not be responsible for the consequences.'

All the scheduled caste and tribe members of the Karnataka Congress Legislature Party headed by J. P. Sarwesh, wrote letters to the Prime Minister, Congress President and others protesting against the removal of Basavalingappa. In the letter they said that the State Government had several achievements to its credit—all which were the handiwork of Basavalingappa. ' At a recent meeting of M.Ps. the Prime Minister had asked the Chief Minister to state the achievements of the Karnataka Government. As a reply the Chief Minister had listed the following, all of which were done by Sri. Basavalingappa :

(1) Putting an end to the nasty system of carrying night-soil as headloads and converting the same into farm manure.

(2) Distribution of house sites in rural areas to those having no sites.

(3) Launching of the people's housing programme.

(4) A massive slum clearance scheme.

(5) Cauvery water supply scheme for Bangalore city

‘The so-called student demonstration was inspired and financed by vested interests Unless the Prime Minister intervenes, we strongly feel that far-reaching socialistic welfare measures launched by the Devraj Urs Government will come to a grinding halt and the administration will become unstable.’

Basavalingappa also wrote a separate letter to Congress President, Shankar Dayal Sharma, on January 25, 1974 explaining the events leading to his dismissal and demanding a high-level probe into the whole episode. The letter said :

The so-called student demonstration in Bangalore on November 26 by a handful of students against my reported speech at Mysore on 19th November 1973 was initiated, organised and financed by the Ministers of the Cabinet and their supporters with a view to creating a point against me for forcing the resignation. About 500 students out of about 50,527 college students in Bangalore were made hirelings and were used for achieving the wilful desires of these partymen. Caste-feelings were roused by these Ministers.

Some papers were purchased to publish the distorted news. The resignations were engineered in my absence. The machinations of our own responsible party ministers and men indulging in such anti-party and indisciplined acts, will have to be put an end to ruthlessly and the guilty be punished. The demonstration was engineered by a section of the members of the Cabinet, who mostly belonged to Janata Paksha, P.S.P. and Congress rebels, who later joined our party. I am more worried about the reputation, discipline and unity of the Congress Party.

I have the material and persons to speak in support of my statement. The police reports of both the State and the Centre are available. They may be sent for and looked into for justifying the statement.

But nothing happened. There was no enquiry as demanded by Basavalingappa and others. Not even a single scheduled caste legislator resigned in protest. There was silence all around. A deathly peace settled over the State though the burning inside the hearts of Dalit youth continued unabated.

The removal of Basavalingappa, had, however, some impact on the State Congress politics. The Dalits of Mysore city retaliated by refusing to vote in a by-election in which the ruling party met with a crushing defeat. A similar defeat in the Arsikere by-election was also attributed to the boycott of irate Dalits, who normally vote en-bloc for Congress.

VI. Basavalingappa's Achievements

The paradox of the 'Basavalingappa episode' was that his 'controversial utterances' clouded his many-splendoured achievements. It is a pity that his critics in the Press and outside chose to ignore this vital aspect since it suited them to do so. However, the *Deccan Herald* (Bangalore, December 20, 1973), in an editorial, paid him some oblique tributes while commenting on the cabinet reshuffle that followed Basavalingappa's exit. 'A man of action, as a rule, becomes controversial, but one need not provoke controversies to be recognised as a man of action. Mr. Basavalingappa seems thoroughly convinced that he had been victimised for as yet unexplained though inferable reasons, and many will certainly sympathise with what he said.'

Bhangi Mukti : The greatest achievement of Basavalingappa was hailed as *Bhangi Mukti*, or the abolishing of the centuries-old revolting practice of untouchables carrying caste Hindus excreta on their heads. No less a person than the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes of the Government of India in a letter to the State Government lauded this bold step.

Bangalore : In a letter to the Municipal Administration Minister, Mr. B. Basavalingappa, the Commissioner, Mr. Shankar Rao Mane, has said he was delighted to read reports about this in the press.

He has said : 'I very much appreciate your action and send you my congratulations. This bold step no doubt is of great

significance to the Harijans who have been engaged in this most unclean hereditary profession for ages. It will surely bring to an end their age-long association with this profession and the resultant social stigma.

‘I hope these people would be diverted to other useful and gainful occupation. You have indeed set a fine example and I feel that other State Governments will also find it possible to follow suit. I am confident that your further efforts to achieve complete *bhangi mukti* will meet with success, as you have your heart in this problem and have moved with determination and courage which are so very necessary for fighting such social evils.’¹⁹

The Prime Minister too marvelled at the success of this scheme which had remained a cherished though unrealised dream of Gandhi’s.

Bangalore: She is understood to have evinced a lot of interest in getting details of this scheme and also knowing the ‘secret of its success’ from Mr. B. Basavalingappa, Minister for Municipal Administration, during a ten-minute interview he had with her at the Raj Bhavan this evening. Asked about this interview with the Prime Minister, Mr. Basavalingappa later told newsmen that she made minute inquiries about the way this scheme was implemented so that other States could emulate the Mysore example. Mr. Basavalingappa told her that the State Government had just spent Rs. 20 lakhs to meet the expenditure of the municipalities. The Prime Minister asked him to send all the literature pertaining to this scheme.²⁰

The *Hindustan Times* correspondent, I. Divakaran, in his report (August 24, 1973), pays tribute to this signal achievement of Basavalingappa’s and says: ‘No Minister had displayed as much zeal as Mr. Basavalingappa for a cause he believed in. To bring in social reform one must have the heart and to carry out the programme one must have the will. Mr. Basavalingappa has shown that he has both.’ Basavalingappa had performed a miracle. What Gandhi could not achieve, Basavalingappa did and proved to the world that he was the first in the country to fulfill Gandhi’s dream.

Free sites and Janata Housing: As already briefly mentioned, the other two revolutionary schemes launched by

¹⁹ *Indian Express*, Sept. 2, 1973.¹

²⁰ *Indian Express*, October 29, 1973.

Basavalingappa were the distribution of free sites and the Janata Housing programme. The Prime Minister herself inaugurated the site distribution campaign at a function held at the Kanteerava Stadium in Bangalore on January 5, 1973. With his extraordinary drive and dynamism, he changed the hide-bound rule of all the municipalities and trust boards to undertake this gigantic task described by the Government as the first of its kind in the State. Side by side with this, he also tackled the slum clearance programme, and a massive house building programme utilising the bountiful Central aid so far not availed of by any previous Minister. The Janata Housing scheme was also considered the first of its kind in the country since independence and it generated tremendous enthusiasm in the rural areas.

Years before the Government of India thought of abolishing the practice of bonded labour, Basavalingappa had a plan to free the serfs and slaves who slogged all their lives for the landed gentry. Returning from a tour of coastal South Kanara, where he witnessed some of the worst forms of bonded labour, he found there untouchables called *Moola holeyas* and *Salada holeyas* who were sold to the landlords for life.

Hindustan Times (February 4, 1973), carried the following story headlined, 'Slavery in Free India'.

Twenty-five years after freedom, there are some communities on Mysore's western coast living in conditions of abject serfdom. The *Kulas* of North Kanara, the *Mula holeyas* of South Kanara, the *Janmade Kulagalus* of Coorg and the *Koragas* of other areas are sold by landowners along with their land. For generations these communities have deemed it an honour to work without wages and landlords have considered it a privilege to own them along with their chattels.

The Labour Department has not bothered to look into their conditions of life because it thinks it has to look only after factory labour. Social welfare agencies have not noticed their existence so far. Mr. Basavalingappa, Minister for Municipal Administration, said yesterday that the Government proposed to conduct a census of these people, acquire land for housing them and open schools for their children. They have lived like animals all these years. Had they been told of their rights they would have revolted long ago, he said. Mr. Basavalingappa who brought the condi-

tions of these people to public notice first, declared : ' their hour of liberation is at hand.'

But Basavalingappa's statement on the existence of bonded labour and his criticisms of the South Kanara landed gentry for this system of continuing serfdom, instantly brought forth sharp rebuff from K. K. Shetty, Lok Sabha member from the district who belonged to the land-owning Bunt community. Truth always hurts. And that is why Basavalingappa's statements are dubbed 'controversial'. The *Hindu* (May 7, 1973) in its 'Man in the News' column paid the following compliment to Basavalingappa : 'Even Mr. Basavalingappa's critics could not hide their admiration for the thoroughness and efficiency with which he applies himself to work relating to his portfolio despite his spells of brusqueness landing him into piquant situations'.

VII. Dalit Youth Betrayed ?

During this writer's tour in different parts of Karnataka, one common complaint of the Dalit youth leaders was that Basavalingappa had deserted them midstream leaving them high and dry. Their only fountainhead of inspiration was lost to them and the Dalit movement was orphaned. They confessed that they had lost their only hope. 'In the murky horizon of the Dalits, Basavalingappa came like a silver lining and before we can stand up and drink in its glory, it disappeared and we are again left behind in darkness', a leader from Mysore city said. They are not so worried about caste Hindu violence. This they are ready for, having been oppressed for generations. Murder, rape, burning and violence are part of their life struggle. They could stand any amount of it. 'So far we have been on the receiving end. But a time may come when this course will be reversed,' a Dalit leader said at Bijapur.

But what really upset them was the silence of Basavalingappa after his exit. They wondered why he should be so upset over his removal from office. 'After all, he could do more service to the Dalits by remaining outside the Government, visiting the districts and encouraging us', a student leader from Bangalore said. Another suggested that Basavalingappa could have become the 'second Ambedkar' for the

entire Dalits if only he had resigned from the Congress Party also as a protest against his removal. They complained that he did not visit any of the districts to boost up the sagging morale of the Dalit movement. Far from touring the districts, he did not care to visit Dalit student hostels even within Bangalore city. But more than anything else what made them really angry was his joining hands with K. H. Patil whom they considered the 'enemy No. 1 of the Dalits'. During the Basavalingappa episode, the youth supporting Basavalingappa had burnt K. H. Patil's effigy and openly criticised him for financing the anti-Basavalingappa episode. They knew that it was K. H. Patil who was behind the ouster move inside the Cabinet.

When asked for his reaction on the Dalit students' charge Basavalingappa said that he could understand their feeling of being let down. But as long as he was in politics he had to adopt a strategy. His defence was that in aligning himself with K. H. Patil, the enemy's enemy became a friend. 'Since Devraj Urs removed me, he becomes my enemy. And this enemy's enemy being Patil, he becomes my friend,' he said, swearing that he had not developed an ideological affinity with K. H. Patil.

To assuage Basavalingappa, the Prime Minister promptly offered him the newly-created post of Special Representative of the A.I.C.C. for Scheduled Castes, Tribes, Backward Classes, Minorities, perhaps to keep him mostly away from his native Karnataka where he might stir up more trouble.

Basappa Basavalingappa (born 1924) is an amazing personality. He might have suffered a temporary fall but in the rough and tumble of Indian life where public memory is short, we cannot say what is in store for him. He is a man who enjoys power and in the peculiar Indian situation, the welfare of the Dalits can be achieved only through power. And Basavalingappa knows the secret of power.

Handsome and always dapper, Basavalingappa is no believer in the Gandhian philosophy of 'renunciation'. Way back when he was a Deputy Home Minister (1957-62) he had built a single-storeyed house in the fashionable Kumara

Park West area and there he leads a comfortable life thanks to his lucrative practice at the Bangalore bar of which he is a prominent member. From morning till late at night he has a stream of visitors whenever he is in town. He is equally popular outside the State. And in the neighbouring Tamil Nadu he is lionised by the rationalist parties like the D.M.K. and Periyar Ramaswamy's D.K. At a mammoth function in Madras, after his removal, Chief Minister Karunanidhi had presented him with 'a sword to fight the enemies of Dalits'. A major portion of his tour all over India is spent in giving lectures which the Press does not now care to report. In his bookshelf are found books on Buddha, Karl Marx and Black Power literature from America. He is a militant Ambedkarite and impatient to change society. 'I say, he is a Mao, he will finish all of us'—this is the remark of a former Chief Secretary to the Karnataka Government who had had intimate connections with Basavalingappa. After taking the B.A. Degree from Maharaja's College and LL.B. from Belgaum, he began his career in Bangalore as a lawyer. That he was selected as President of the State wing of the Forum of Lawyers, a body of left-leaning advocates proves the high esteem he enjoyed in that profession.

Whatever may be the charges against Basavalingappa none can deny the fact of his supreme sacrifice for the Dalit cause. He could have continued as Minister and lasted the whole term by appeasing the high caste Hindus. There are any number of such 'good Harijan Ministers' who have been very popular with society because they avoided any confrontation. Like worms they were born and like worms they died—unsung, unwept. Basavalingappa too could have continued in power, pleasing the high castes. If he had only been indifferent to the Dalits, he would have continued in power. If he had taken an anti-Dalit stance, he would have become still more popular, but he did not care for this tawdry transient popularity. He went down fighting bravely facing the avalanche of high caste fury. This is his greatest sacrifice and in turn the greatest contribution to the Dalit cause. That is why Basavalingappa will go down in history as the father of the modern Dalit movement in Karnataka.

CHAPTER III

DALIT LITERATURE

In spite of a fairly rich tradition of 'protest writing' right from the early period of the 12th century, Karnataka State is undoubtedly far behind neighbouring Maharashtra in the field of Dalit literature. Lately, Dalit literature has received a shot in the arm due to the 'Basavalingappa episode' from which has emerged at least a dozen promising Dalit poets and writers and some militant journals to uphold the Dalit cause.

Before going deeper into the subject it is necessary to understand what is popularly meant by 'Dalit literature' which lately has received recognition even from orthodox writers. Dalit literature will be the literature of the future. It is called protest literature since it rejects all that is undesirable in the old tradition-bound, religion-soaked literature of the past. Any angry writings against exploitation and oppression can be considered Dalit literature. The down-trodden sections of society which form the subject matter of Dalit literature, may belong to the untouchables and tribals, landless labourers and urban workers. They may even be Muslims, the persecuted minority, and also women whose treatment as chattels was sanctioned by Manu, the law-giver. Any writing that voices the pent up emotions and aspirations of these sections may eventually become a part of Dalit literature, although the primary function of Dalit literature may be to attack the caste system.

I. Vachana Sahitya and Sarvajna

Vachana Sahitya, the literature produced out of the utterances of the illiterate, low caste, common men and women who were involved in Karnataka's first ever socio-religious revolution under the leadership of Basava in the early period of the 12th century, is considered the first available Dalit literature

of Karnataka. To a traveller in the realm of ancient Kannada literature which has a history of nearly 1,500 years, the literary expression known as *Vachanas* is an island of freshness and beauty. Dr. G. S. Shivarudrappa hails *Vachana Sahitya* as the unique expression of the early medieval period and says they are considered to be a 'great contribution of Kannada literature to world literature'. This is indeed a rare phenomenon in literature.

Vachana Sahitya is the product of Veerasaivism, the very first protest movement in Karnataka against Brahminism. Basava and his followers rejected the authority of the Vedas and began to think for themselves. As a result the *Vachanas* were born. These *Vachanas* are simple prose-poems written for the first time in Kannada literature in the language of the common man. They brought tremendous awakening among the down trodden and their influence spread to all parts of Karnataka and beyond. The *Vachanakars* virulently protested against all sorts of inequalities of sex, caste, creed and class and tried to establish an egalitarian society ; that is why the *Vachanas* are hailed by many eminent writers as the 'Kannada Upanishads'. They were the result of a social upheaval by and for the poor ; the low caste and the out caste against the rich and the privileged ; and the uprising of the unlettered against the literate pandits. They spearheaded a new religious movement which embraced the humble, the poor and the down trodden and made use of every language as its medium of communication. Historians have said that after the Buddha, it was Basavanna alone, who, avoiding Sanskrit, spoke about religion in the regional language.

It is to be noted that all the *Vachanakars* belonged to the low caste and some even to the out castes. They were illiterate too. Apart from Basava, Allama and Akka Mahadevi who belonged to a higher order, there were Ambigara Chowdaiah—a boatsman, Maraiah—a wood-cutter, Chandaiah—a rope maker, Ketthaiah—a basket maker, Bheemanna—a mason, Ramanna—a herdsman, Ramavve—a female spinner, Sankavve—a prostitute, and many others. Dr. Shivarudrappa says, 'There were more than 300 men and 80 women

Vachanakars. This integral response from the common man towards literature in early medieval Karnataka is a rare occurrence. The most interesting thing here is that these men and women composed their *Vachanas* drawing images from the sphere of their profession and experience. For example, Ambigara Chowdaiah, a boatman by profession, says in one of his *Vachanas* that he would take men across the river in his boat provided they pay as fare, the devotion of their minds.¹

Vachana Sahitya brought about the first renaissance in Kannada literary history and hence can be safely considered the first Dalit literature of Karnataka having pioneered the cause of the untouchables as early as the 12th century and sought to build a classless and casteless society free from exploitation. It broke the monopoly of the Brahmin writers and changed the attitude of the future poets and writers. Harihara, a major poet of the 13th century was to a great extent influenced by the *Vachana Sahitya*. He sang about the common man in his narrative tales, known as *Ragale*, choosing for the first time a hunter, a potter, a tiller and an outcaste as the heroes of his poetry. According to Dr. Shivarudrappa the *Vachana Sahitya* of the 12th century has been one of the main sources of modern Kannada poetry.

Sarvajna: The People's Poet. Sarvajna is considered one of Karnataka's ancient Dalit poets. Born near Dharwar to a low caste woman, Sarvajna created a veritable revolution in Kannada literature. There is yet no unanimity among modern writers about the time in which he lived and different authorities put it between the 15th and 18th centuries. Though he is considered a historical successor of the *Vachanakars*, he went a step forward by refusing to work within the framework of any religion. He produced Kannada's first secular literature, fiercely denouncing the caste system, religion and all that went on in the name of Brahminism.

¹ Speech delivered at the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Seminar in Bangalore on Jan. 27, 1976.

What Tiruvalluvar is to Tamil Nadu and Vemana to Telugu literature, Sarvajna is to Kannada literature. These three great poets of protest had one common trait—all of them were of humble origin—all born in low caste families. They rejected the authority of Vedic scriptures and the supremacy of the Brahmins and accorded the highest place to the common man—the true Dalit. They heaped the worst abuse on Brahminism and attached the topmost importance to the Dalits. These poets produced enormous literature and their sayings are now household proverbs.

According to Dodda Range Gowda, Sarvajna was real dynamite. Not many modern Dalit poets have exploded in as much anger as this ancient poet. He minces no words in attacking the Brahmin priests, exposing the hollowness of their 'sacred thread', the deceit behind their painted foreheads and the treachery concealed behind their sacred mantras.² Kale Gowda Nagawara calls Sarvajna, Karnataka's first 'peoples' poet'. He had the courage and roughness of a Dalit; without fear or favour, he upheld truth, denounced the barbarity of Brahminism, its Karma theory, value system and the caste system that condemned a sizeable section of human beings as untouchable. Sarvajna was a great upholder of woman's rights and denounced the Brahmin theory that woman is not fit to be free. It is to be noted that had Sarvajna's *Vachanas* been in writing, the Brahmins would have destroyed them, but fortunately, even to this day they remain not on paper but within the minds of the people. They were passed on by mouth, from one generation to the next and will continue to pass from person to person until the enemies of Sarvajna discover how to destroy people's minds.

II. The Philosophy of Dalit Literature

Whatever the literary highbrows among upper caste Hindus may say, Dalit literature has come to stay in Karnataka. The Dalit writers have been well received even by Karnataka's eminent writers including Dr. K. V. Puttappa, the poet laureate

² Sarvajna, *A Critical Review*, pp. 75-86, Bangalore University.

of Karnataka. As yet, the study of Dalit literature has not become a part of the curriculum for students in schools and colleges in Karnataka but that stage is sure to come soon. However, the three Universities in the State—Mysore, Karnataka and Bangalore Universities—have started giving some encouragement to Dalit writers at the instance of Education Minister Mallikarjunaswamy, himself a Dalit and a scholar. Dr. H. Narasimhiah, who was Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University and also a Dalit, has taken a lead in organising a number of seminars and publishing books of angry young Dalit writers. Some of the Dalit writers have secured important positions in the Universities and pose quite a challenge to orthodox writers.

Some sinister attempts are being made to confuse peoples' minds as to who is the real Dalit and what is meant by Dalit literature. Some people say that a Dalit is identified not on the basis of his 'caste' but 'class'. All those who are exploited and poor irrespective of caste can be considered Dalits. This is essentially a Marxist argument rejected by the Dalits. The Dalit philosophy combines 'caste struggle' and 'class struggle'. It is for this reason that Dalit philosophy is considered superior to Marxist philosophy and, therefore, offers the ideal solution to the peculiar socio-economic problem of Hindu India where castes cut across classes and vice versa.

If 'class struggle' alone could bring about victory for the Marxist cause, why is it limping even after decades of Communist movement in India? Being one of the poorest and most backward nations in the world, India should have offered the most fertile ground for the growth of communism. The Communist Party, whether C.P.I. or the C.P.M., should have been the most powerful party in India since it considers itself the sole representative of the exploited masses. But why has it not been able to take over even a single State in the Union of India by its own strength? Why has it failed to penetrate the *bustees* of the Dalits—the most exploited lot in the country? This proves the point that the Marxist philosophy has failed to attract the Dalits whose salvation lies in a happy combination of class and caste struggles, by welding

the Marxian philosophy to that of Ambedkar's thoughts. The very fact that political parties which have combined these twin philosophies are becoming popular in this country proves the efficacy of the Dalit philosophy—the panacea for the myriad maladies of Hindu India.

Underlying all Dalit literature is Dalit philosophy or the philosophy of the underdog. It is not essential that all those who write Dalit literature should hail from the ranks of the Dalits. Some of the Dalit writers in Karnataka come from the upper castes and the Dalits have considered their writing as Dalit literature. Dalit literature is something unique and different from other literature. In an angry volcanic outburst the Dalit writer desires to destroy the very order of the society based on the Varna system and its rationale. The Kannada caste Hindu writer could never emerge from his small pond to which his experiences were confined. He blindly copied the West. But the Dalit writer rejects the literary values, theories, the rules, and the relative aesthetic values in literature established by white-coloured Kannada writers and critics. Dalit literature thus regards man as its centrifugal point. It leads man towards a total revolution.

It is a pity that the traditional Kannada literature is confined to things which are of no consequence to man. Most of the writings deal with gods, religion, Vedas and Puranas or nature and beauty. Others have gone in a different direction. Very few Kannada writers, however, have found the time or had the ability to write on Man or his sufferings. Perhaps they avoided writing on Man because it would lead to 'controversy'. When a writer chooses man as his subject, he has to identify man, his caste, religion and all that goes with it. Hence Kannada writers skipped man and sought refuge in the safer and more convenient terrestrial objects.

Devanur Mahadeva, the doyen of Karnataka's Dalit writers who has several works to his credit, has concentrated his efforts mostly to expose the duplicity of these high caste writers. He is ruthless in attacking the caste system that has nullified democracy in India. He said, 'This pernicious system has reduced democracy into a mockery. For example, India has a huge population of Dalits—30% scheduled castes and

tribes and 15% Muslims—forming a total of 45% of the country's population. Among this 45% the literate may not constitute even 2%. If we exclude this 2% we are left with 43% of 'living dead' Dalits. Their number is more than half the population of this country. It is these people who are the real owners of this country. It is they who must have the upper hand in deciding the policies of this country. Things must be changed, as we Dalits demand it. That is called real democracy. But what is the use? The poor people belonging to the upper castes do not like to join us. Even if these high caste poor people die of hunger why don't they want to fight along with us?³

Dalit literature thus aims at building a new society. It rejects everything that is old and hinders the progress of society. Sridhar Kaliveera, an angry young Dalit poet, says that he is not prepared to consider anything as literature which goes against the cause of Dalits. 'All sorts of people have attempted to write literature and after writing it, only they call it literature—Adiga, Gidiga, etc.' He continues that a writer should always represent the people but 'a deceased mind that tries to find something noble in the rotten Puranic literature can never endear the people.'⁴

As Y. B. Chavan, then External Affairs Minister, said while addressing the Marathi Sahitya Sammelan on December 6, 1975 at Karad, 'It is wrong to deride the language of the down trodden authors. It is wrong to expect that the first expressions of the people, who were suppressed and oppressed for thousands of years, should be in a sophisticated language. The very fact that the expression had come about should be welcomed.'⁵ The language employed by the Dalit writers may be crude and blunt. When infuriated young poets like Siddalingayya or K. Narayanaswamy from the oppressed classes called angrily for the destruction of the decadent and corrupt Hindu social structure, it may have caused a shudder. Their revolt against pious platitudes and resort to a new language and idiom might have shocked the puritans.

³ *Sankramana*, Monthly Journal, August 15, 1974, p. 23.

⁴ *Dalita*, February 1975, p. 39.

⁵ *Times of India*, December 7, 1975.

But times change. New language arises out of new feeling. The 'defenders of culture' are not new to India. Every time some new idiom or phrase or language was used these 'defenders of culture' were up in arms to fight the opponents of status quo. It happened in England and also in America.

If the spontaneous and anguished outburst of the oppressed is to be condemned as unartistic and obscene, then we ought to change the definition of art and literature and adopt a more positive approach to evaluate literary works, says K. Narayana-swamy. So far most of the writers drawn from the upper castes, 'had ignored the problems of the major section of the Indian population and confined themselves to metaphysics, middle class morality, naïve humanism, and hair-splitting arguments. We reject all of them and are concerned solely with man and his shackles.' Compared to neighbouring Maharashtra, Karnataka may have produced a handful of such Dalit writers of the calibre of Kaliveera, but they have created a revolution in the Kannada literary world. They have come up despite stiff opposition from the upper caste writers and also the hostility of the upper caste controlled Press in the State. And today, they have become a power to be reckoned with.

III. Modern Dalit Writers

The very first opportunity to provide a platform for the Dalit writers was given by the Karnataka Barahagarara Mattu Kalavidara Vokkuta (a united front of writers and artists) which had its historic session at Mysore on April 20, 1973. This first protest movement in the history of Karnataka literature was inaugurated by Dr. K. V. Puttappa, who had inspired many a Dalit writer in Karnataka. Calling for a 'cultural revolution', Dr. Puttappa in his inaugural speech hailed the efforts of Prof. Chandrasekhar Patil who master-minded this literary revolution. In a speech noted for its devastating frankness, the poet laureate dismissed the majority of works in Kannada literature as cattlefeed (*bhoosa*) and called upon the younger generation to create a humanist literature that will kindle people to action. The Vokkuta Conference created a big furore in Karnataka and the controversy was fanned by the upper caste controlled Press which is ever ready to malign

any progressive cause. The Conference was dubbed by these elements as being an 'anti-Brahmin revolt' by writers belonging to the landed gentry, the Vokkaligas and Lingayats, the two dominant castes of Karnataka. Efforts were again made to confuse class with caste and to find fault with the organisers for not inviting even a single Brahmin writer to the Conference. 'If the Vokkuta writers say that they stand for fighting exploitation and poverty, are there no poor people among Brahmins also? Why should they hate Brahmins as a class? Can anybody accuse the entire Brahmin community as being a set of bad people? Does this not smack of prejudice? Let us admit that Brahmins as a class are exploiters, but are there no similar exploiters among Vokkaligas and Lingayats? Is the Vokkuta ready to fight the exploiters among these communities? Are there no exploiters in every caste and religion?'⁶

Vokkuta authorities were bombarded with these questions directed mostly against Shudra writers like Purnachandra Tejaswi, Chandrasekhar Patil, M. D. Nanjundaswami and Lankesh—the spirit behind the Vokkuta.

Devanur Mahadeva, who played a leading role at the Vokkuta Conference, effectively answered these familiar charges when asked how he joined the gang of feudal forces who actually enforced untouchability in the rural areas and in turn exploited the Dalits. 'There are two types of exploitation: one visible, another invisible—like direct taxes and indirect taxes. If Brahmins, Shudras and Dalits can be divided into three parts, they can be roughly compared with brain power, heart and stomach. Brahminism is not the philosophy of a particular caste group. It is a fascist philosophy which every Brahmin has to destroy even in his self-interest. The brain power is crushing both the heart and the stomach. Besides, those who get promoted from the stomach and heart to brain also join this game of crushing the rest. This is evident everywhere. The heart at least has a shape. We can see it with our eyes and witness how it is pounding and crushing the stomach. But the brain power has no shape. It is invisible. Hence what is invisible is more dangerous than the

⁶ *Spandana*, Kala Sahitya Prakashana, Bangalore, p. 83.

visible enemy. Therefore, we must first destroy the invisible enemy. Since we are fighting the invisible enemy we have to identify first the major contradiction as per the games of war. If we win in this war, then we can plan our next strategy. Since the next war is against a visible enemy, perhaps, we may have to even get into physical fight. We are ready for that also.”⁷

The Dalit revolt in Karnataka is of recent origin of about three to four years. The origin of the revolt may be traced to the controversial Basavalingappa episode already described. It triggered off the Dalit protest literature. It started springing up particularly in the three university centres of Bangalore, Mysore and Dharwar. Part of the inspiration came from the Dalit Panthers who at this time were hitting the headlines in the neighbouring State of Maharashtra. The anger against the existing upper caste oriented romantic literature in Kannada produced solely for the entertainment of the elite, for the first time brought to the surface some promising Dalit poets and writers.

The most outstanding among them is Devanur Mahadeva of Mysore who produced quite a sizable amount of revolutionary writings denouncing the caste-dominated Hindu society, superstition, religious bigotry, exploitation of agricultural labourers and the myriad problems of untouchables surrounded by a heartless society. Notable among other writers are Buddanna Hingamire and Sridar Kalivire of the Karnataka University at Dharwar, Siddalingiah, a student leader and revolutionary thinker of Bangalore University, and K.Narayanaswamy, a teacher of Kolar district. Miss Motamma, a student leader of Bangalore, is also fast shaping into a very effective writer among Dalit women. The fire-eating writings of these Dalits are aimed solely at rousing the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe youth to action. Having been subjected to centuries of exploitation and serfdom, their newly acquired knowledge of the English language and western ideas exposed them to Ambedkar’s philosophy, Marxist and Maoist thinking and made many of them fire full blast against Hinduism and its caste system of which untouchability is an essential part.

⁷ Devanur Mahadeva in *Sankramana*, August 15, 1974, p. 31.

Some of the revolutionary Dalit writings openly advocated a revolution on the Maoist pattern. Some other poets have given a call to destroy the existing Brahmin literature in Kannada and to build a new cultural rebellion reflecting Dalit toil and tears.

Dalita published from Dharwar, *Shudra*, published from Bangalore and *Panchama* published from Mysore, all Kannada journals, are packed with pro-Mao, pro-Periyar Ramaswamy and pro-Ambedkar writings and contain also translations from the works of Dalit Panthers and Black literature from the U.S., U.K. and Africa. *Shudra Sahitya* is the new name given to this protest literature through which is intended the displacement of Sanskritised literature written in praise of god, king and nature with the more easily understandable literature reflecting the thoughts, aspirations and pulsating emotions of the Dalits who are not only at the bottom of the economic pyramid but also at the base of the social hierarchy. An important feature of this Dalit protest literature is the total rejection of the 'small mercies' that Government doles out to them in order to restrain their anger. A militant poet like Sridar Kaliveera asks Dalits to rip off the Gandhian mask of non-violence. 'We have taken to non-violence because there is no other go. Since we are not allowed to keep arms, we are forced to remain non-violent which is the other word for our cowardice. When we have not even got a blade to shave our beards with, can we think of bigger weapons?' he asks.⁸ K. Narayanaswamy says that Dalits, who constitute the single largest section of the population (about 30%), will be satisfied only if they become the lords of the land because, 'it is the Dalits who are the original inhabitants of India and all others are invaders.' He is disgusted with the existing 'Leftist parties' and their failure is traced to their upper caste leadership: 'that is the reason why Communism has failed to penetrate the Harijan bustees'. He is also disgusted with the Constitution which has given protection to private property and caste system.

Siddalingiah, a powerful Dalit youth leader and writer of Bangalore, says that those who denounce Dalit literature have not experienced the sufferings of the down trodden and hence

⁸ *Dalita*, Feb. 1975, p. 36.

are ill-equipped to judge Dalit writings based on the rejection of traditional values. If the spontaneous outburst of anger and anguish of the Dalits is to be condemned as unartistic, then we had better change the very definition of art and adopt a more positive approach to evaluate literary works, he says.

Another Dalit youth D. R. Nagaraj of Bangalore, spearheading the attack on Brahmin literature says the first task of the Dalits should be to destroy the very concept of *tyaga* (sacrifice) glorified in the person of Dana Shura Karna. Mysore-math, a senior correspondent of *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, and a Lingayat, sympathising with the Dalit cause says in his poem, 'Dalit Mamara': 'Sacrifice is glorified because it is to the advantage of the exploiting classes. This very concept must be destroyed because *tyaga* has become the other word for exploitation, if not robbery. Till now the central theme of all our literature has been *tyaga*—the best tool in the hands of the ruling class. On our life based on sacrifice and suffering, these exploiting classes have built their lives of pleasure. We are asked to work hard and produce more, so that they can eat more and sleep more. Unless we destroy this concept of *tyaga*, we cannot build a new society'. Compared to the Kannada-speaking scheduled caste youth the Tamil-speaking Dalit writers in Karnataka appear to be more militant. This is perhaps because they live in districts bordering Tamil Nadu, which has been traditionally progressive. One of the outstanding Tamil writers is S. Gunasheelan, a Reserve Bank employee with two published works to his credit. In his book, *Origin of Caste*, he attacks the 'upper caste' communists for ignoring the fight against the caste system. He is more angry with the 'shudra caste who excell Brahmins and others in observing caste apartheid towards untouchables'. In a scathing attack on the 'fascist tenets of Hinduism' Gunasheelan says: 'The caste culture and its apartheid is a standing monument of the de-humanisation of the human being amidst the tall claims of the great civilisations. It is its opposite or anti-thesis. Only the wretched among the beings could ever claim them as the great cultural achievements, and hell with their concoctions'.⁹

⁹ 'To Shed the Snake's Skin', article written while in jail during Feb. 1976.

G. R. Genjigatti, an angry Congress worker from Dharwar, has made a bold attempt in his book, *Origin of Untouchables*, to put forward an Ambedkarite explanation and says the untouchable will hate to be called Hindu. The call given at different Dalit youth meetings and through their protest literature is to stop begging and start demanding, if not seizing. They are very critical of the half-hearted measures of Government which have not touched even the fringe of their gigantic problem. Despite the constitutional directive of compulsory education to all children, the literacy rate among the Dalits has not reached even 5% while the State average is 30%. The 18% constitutional reservations in admissions to educational institutions and jobs in government services is never observed despite repeated strictures by different legislature committees. Untouchability is rampant and everywhere untouchables are discriminated against.

A. S. Rajan, another young writer and President of the militant All Karnataka Scheduled Caste and Tribes Welfare Organisation, in his poem *Emancipation*, has poured out the pent-up feelings of seething Dalits. He writes on 'Emancipation' thus :

Tall buildings and tall claims !
Fall of the building millions ' We ' proclaim !
Toiling millions are starved and underfed,
Spoiling exploiters are overfed.

The toiling masses are underclothed,
But the exploiting few overclothed ;
Boiling ' We ' are with fret and fume,
Smiling are the wretched exploiters.

Speeches galore, vain promises galore,
Sugar-coated solaces galore ;
But the sufferings of the suffering remain,
Hearing and seeing of the sufferings pain.

Our theoretical Republic says,
' Everyone is a king ' .
But it is a pitiable thing
To hear of our practical Republic
Saying, ' Millions are pavement-dwellers
And slum-dwellers ' .

Mahatmas have come
And Mahatmas have gone

But the sufferings have not gone,
 The sufferings won't go
 Until the exploited awake, and arise
 To break the shackle and bondage.

Rajan's organisation is not only styled on the lines of the Dalit Panthers but a number of its members have strong Leftist leanings. At a Press conference early in 1975 Rajan threatened that Harijans, out of disgust, may even embrace Islam. This may have been just a threat as a counter-blast to certain Hindu organisations putting on a cloak of Harijan welfare. Of all the religions, what made him opt for Islam? According to him both the Untouchables and the Muslims have many things in common. Both are persecuted minorities; both are equally hated and massacred by the tyrannical caste Hindu society. The future of the untouchables depends on an axis between these two communities forming 30% and 13% of the Indian population. What a formidable force it would be, he said, if these two people were to put up a joint fight for liberation, evolving an indigenous radicalism by welding the Marxian philosophy of class struggle with the social rebellion of Dr. Ambedkar!

Kambaiah Narayanaswamy (38), a lecturer belonging to a scheduled tribe is one of the outstanding Dalit writers of Karnataka with several fiery works to his credit. A scholar in Kannada, Telugu and Hindi he has published a number of articles and books. Narayanaswamy has translated Dr. Ambedkar's works and *Guide to Untouchables*, a book written by the Telugu poet, Padmashri Boi Bhimanna. His other works include, *Strategy for Dalit Revolution*, *Dalita Kaipidi*, and *Digambara Kavigalu*, a translation of the Andhra revolutionary poets. Simple, unassuming and austere, Narayanaswamy has devoted his entire life to the Dalit cause. Apart from being a fiery writer, he has also organised the Dalit youth and uses even the class rooms to propogate the cause of the Dalits. Kolar district, which has the highest concentration of Dalits—30% of untouchables as compared to the State average of 13%—provides him with fertile ground to work for the Dalit cause. What worries him most is that there are not enough translations of Ambedkar's writings or any other Dalit writings in Kannada. He is equally worried that the Congress

Dalit leaders are interested only in holding on to office. In an interview he said : ' It is the cultural deprivation of the Dalits that needs the highest attention. The attention of the Government should have been concentrated on the cultural aspect instead of throwing some crumbs to the Dalits. The allegation that Dalits are misusing welfare is perhaps correct since these poor ignorant Dalits do not know how to make proper use of these facilities provided for them due to their inadequacies and their cultural deprivation. Neither are the Dalit leaders nor is the Government interested in creating a cultural awareness in the minds of Dalits—which Basavalingappa did very well while he was in office. Unfortunately, he stopped doing so abruptly once he was removed from the Ministership. There is need for continued and sustained efforts in this direction. What is desirable is for a mobile van to visit each village in turn staging drama, folksongs, film-shows and distributing literature. Since illiteracy is almost cent per cent among the Dalits, only cultural shows like films, dance, drama and songs could work wonders, Narayanaswamy observed, laying the greatest stress on cultural revolution.

Narayanaswamy has written a number of articles highlighting the many tragedies befalling the Dalits. One tragedy is that the moment a Dalit receives an education, he is lost to the community. ' He waits for a Government job and the moment he gets it, he is no longer with us '. Narayanaswamy asks the Dalits to migrate to urban areas for, ' As long as the Dalits remain in a village, they will continue to suffer the humiliation of untouchability and be centred out for discrimination and caste Hindu atrocities. And hence I would advocate the wholesale migration to urban areas. Even if they do not get jobs there, they will lose nothing by such migration. On the other hand, they stand to gain a lot. The urban anonymity will save the Dalits from the stigma of untouchability.' Another great tragedy facing the Dalits is the total hostility from the upper caste dominated Press including the Kannada Press in Karnataka. Information about Harijan atrocities is deliberately suppressed although occasional publicity is given to prove impartiality. ' This is because most of the journalists are Brahmins ', he says. He is worried that after Ambedkar,

this country has not produced a second Dalit leader. The Dalit movement is hardly evident in the country today—except for some writings published here and there. The future is bleak for the Dalits and every day brings with it a fresh sorrow.

It is a great pity that the coastal area of South Kanara, which is rated as one of the most advanced districts in the whole country with many firsts to its credit, takes the backseat when it comes to the question of Dalits. No doubt the district has just a sprinkling of scheduled castes (5.14 per cent as against the State average of 13.14 per cent) but when it comes to scheduled tribes it has a sizable population (3.27 per cent as against the State average of 0.79 per cent). But whether it is in the case of untouchables or that of the scheduled tribes, there is hardly any Dalit movement worth the name in South Kanara—not to speak of Dalit literature. Amid this all pervading gloom, the only Dalit writer is Vishukumar.

Hailing from the once untouchable Billava (Ediga) caste, Vishukumar (35) is a top literary personality in the whole of Karnataka. Perhaps no other person at so young an age has gained so many credits to his name—nine novels, over a dozen short stories, countless articles, and plays which have been both staged and filmed. Apart from his literary achievements, Vishukumar has made an impact as a top film personality both as a director and also as an actor with several films to his credit. Every piece of his writing is marked by a burning desire for social change. He comes from a poor, oppressed toddy-tapper community, and the grounding that he received as the Religious Endowment Inspector in State Government Service afforded him a wonderful opportunity to have a glimpse of the mischief going on in temple administration where the Brahmin priests, hand-in-glove with the feudal lords, mostly Bunts, looted the gullible villagers. In every writing of his, Vishukumar has mercilessly exposed the mischief created by Brahmins and Bunts thereby attracting the wrath of the upper castes. But he was courageous enough to withstand it. As the 'Inspector of gods' he had a ringside seat at the secret goings on in every temple. 'If at all there is any class which knows fully well that there is no god, it is the

priestly class. To them god is a handy object through which they can exploit the gullible and make money out of them', Vishukumar said in an interview.

Handsome and aggressive, Vishukumar has become a controversial figure in the whole of Karnataka. He is a versatile Dalit writer of great promise, and is feared as well as respected, although he has not as yet been given the honour due to a literary personality of his status. In order to eradicate the caste system he would like the highest importance to be given to education; government sanction for inter-caste marriage; and revolutionary temple reforms which will help to destroy Brahmin monopoly. In his capacity as Endowment Inspector, he has helped many untouchables to become temple trustees—something quite unheard of in the history of upper caste dominated coastal South Kanara. As Endowment Inspector, Vishukumar has learnt to recognise the power behind the temple and the influence it wields on the society steeped in religion. Any reform in temple administration will bring about a big revolution in the entire village. And he has worked towards that cause in his own humble way. If only he had belonged to a high caste, a writer of the calibre of Vishukumar would have, by this time, become an All-India figure. But being a Dalit he was kept down and each time made to wade through a stream of 'controversies'. His novels, *Nettara Gana*, *Bhagawantana Atmakathe*, *Gagana Ganigalu*, the controversial *Karavali* and *Mother*, *Viplava*, *Hamsaksheera* and *Karma* were serialised in different daily papers before being published in book form. Already a stage artist, he soon stormed the film world directing the first most popular Tulu movie, *Koti Chennayya*. His *Karavali* produced quite a controversy. Vishukumar has himself acted in several other movies—all with social change as its main theme.

Puttur Kamalaksha (39), a khadi clad scheduled caste of the Mundala sub-sect is another notable writer though he lacks the revolutionary fervour of Vishukumar. Referring to the plight of Dalits in South Kanara, Kamalaksha traces it to their poverty and ignorance. The Dalits are the poorest; not even 1% possess any land and they live by eking out a livelihood as agricultural labourers. 'When his life itself is a burden,

how can you expect a Dalit consciousness,' Kamalaksha said, in an interview.

According to him, Narayana Kille was the first person in the district to start a mild form of protest movement about 30 years back. But now there is none. The only incident which he could remember occurred at Mangalore in 1941 when some Harijan families made the first ever violent protest. Ranga Rao Talcherikar, a Saraswat Brahmin lawyer, then practising at Mangalore, gives a graphic description of it in an article in *Tushar*.¹⁰ The death of Chandra Mukhari, a leader of the Mundala sub-caste, provided an excellent opportunity to the Harijan youth to demand that the body be cremated at the Nandigudda Municipal cemetery allegedly reserved for caste Hindus. There was a clash between the 'Harijan' youth and caste Hindus and following this they forcibly entered the cemetery and cremated the body. And the caste Hindus promptly went to court even against this simple action. The incident caused a stir in the district and the whole society came down heavily on these 'Harijan' youths and the Government too added to the injustice by filing criminal cases against them. Ranga Rao Talcherikar, himself a rebel, argued the case. Though there was hardly any legal ground for action, a Brahmin magistrate issued the arrest warrant against the Harijan youths of which one was Gopal Salenna, who later became a noted Dalit leader of the district.

The agitated Dalits of the district thought they could get no justice from caste Hindu judicial officers and hence demanded that the case be transferred to a non-Hindu. In the article Ranga Rao Talcherikar reproduces the merciless questions that he put to caste Hindu prosecution witnesses, and their hypocritical answers. But the judgement of the Muslim magistrate came as a shock. 'Since untouchability is still being practised, the cremation of the body of an untouchable will definitely wound the feelings of caste Hindus and hence it is an offence', the judgement said. Fortunately, the then Collector of the district, Ramdas, took up the appeal himself and acquitted the 'Harijan' youths thus creating a

¹⁰ *Tushar*, June 1975, pp. 73 to 79.

sensation in the district. This is perhaps the first and last Dalit protest in South Kanara where the lot of the untouchables and weaker sections continues to be one of the worst in the country.

According to Kamalaksha, the district has failed to produce a single Dalit leader except for the late S. G. Salenna. After his death the Dalits were orphaned. Salenna was elected to the State Assembly for three terms. Unlike the rest of Karnataka, there is hardly any militancy even among the educated Dalit youth in South Kanara. This is because the moment a Dalit gets a little education, he seeks a Government job and that means his mouth is sealed forever. 'The moment a Dalit gets a Government job, he is as good as dead. He thinks that the monthly salary he gets is the be all and end all of life. Besides, those who become government servants, become a class by themselves, aloof and separate. They form a superior class isolated from the rest of the Dalits. They cease to be of any use to their kith and kin', Kamalaksha said in an interview.

Why is it that the C.P.I. and C.P.M., which have a strong base in South Kanara, have failed to mobilise the Dalits? According to Kamalaksha both these parties have not moved outside their urban base. When this is the case how then can they think of the agricultural labourers? Another important shortcoming of the Communist Party is that it is not interested in the social issues of the Communists, he said. 'They are only interested in the class struggle based on the Marxian principle and as such never try to tap the energies of the Dalits. As long as the communists fail to recognise the realities of the situation—that is the caste system—communism can never catch up in India'. The communists do not believe in taking up the basic problems of the Dalits like untouchability. The land-grab movement launched by the C.P.I. in South Kanara remained only on paper. On the other hand, the movement did some definite harm to the Dalits as the caste Hindus forcibly occupied the land reserved for Dalits in South Kanara, Kamalaksha said. In his book, *Social History of South Kanara Harijans and Girijans*, Kamalaksha has done thorough research of the problem of different sub-sects of Dalits in

South Kanara. He remembers the service rendered to the Dalits by Kudmal Ranga Rao, a Saraswat Brahmin of Mangalore and father-in-law of the late P. Subbaroyan. It was Ranga Rao who established a chain of 'Harijan hostels' as early as 1897. Kamalaksha also pays tribute to K. Iswara, who for 20 years, remained the first M.L.A. of the district.

The Dalits of the district are grateful to Basavalingappa for stopping the age-old heinous practice of carrying nightsoil as head-loads; but another equally obnoxious practice still remains which is the eating of food in the leaves discarded outside temples and other mass-feedings. The Koraga tribe is known for eating carcass and food thrown out. Kamalaksha is now trying his best to persuade the Koragas to give up this practice since it generates the attitude of beggary which is worse than carrying night soil. In many places, the Dalits eat the discarded food in the company of expectant dogs. Hence, in what way are the Dalits superior to dogs? In the Dharmastala temple, the practice was stopped after a public uproar but in other temples, where public feeding is still in vogue, this system continues. 'Instead of giving them the thrown away food, why not make the waiting Dalits sit in a row and feed them like other humans', Kamalaksha asks. But there is still a long way to go and South Kanara remains a paradox for the sociologists.

Another important Dalit writer of the district is Udupi Chandra, a retired government servant. Though he lacks the militancy of other Dalit writers, Chandra has made a number of studies on bonded labour and the problem of the Koragas who form a sizable population among the tribes. He would like the government to treat the case of the Koragas as it dealt with Tibetan refugees granting them lands, loans, houses and other facilities.

IV. Dalit Journals

With the spurt in Dalit literary activities, a number of journals also sprung up in different university centres to uphold the Dalit cause and to provide a publishing outlet for the Dalit writers who emerged during the Basavalingappa

episode. The caste Hindu wrath over Basavalingappa's angry outbursts provoked these young writers and quite a number of them produced some fine literary gems. Their writings vehemently supported Basavalingappa's rationalist battle and Mysore, Bangalore, Dharwar and Gulbarga cities were the four chief centres of these literary activities of the Dalits.

Dalita :

Buddhanna Hingamire of Karnataka University, Dharwar, channelised the activities of his colleagues and gave new direction to their literary activities, inviting intellectual participation in discussing the life and problems of Dalits. The very first issue of *Dalita* released from Dharwar by a blacksmith, a tongawala and a sweeper, at a simple function, became a landmark in the history of the Dalit literary activities and created a stir among the youth and intellectuals all over the State. Buddhanna along with his colleagues Someshekhar Imrapur, Chennana Walikar and R. V. Hordi collected some youths and gave a new complexion to Kannada literary history.

R. N. Torvi, President of Ambedkar Association, Dharwar, strengthened his hands by propagating the view of Dr. Ambedkar through his articles. Hordi's article published in the first issue of *Dalita* was very well received by the intellectuals. In the subsequent issues of *Dalita*, Walikar, Imrapur, Katkar, Siddhalinga Desai and others exhibited ardent zeal and enthusiasm. Shridhar Kaliveer, a revolutionary youth, Arvind Goudar, Katrdhally and Vijaya Patil and his colleagues entered the scene with high literary talent.

Andolana :

Rajshekar Koti's *Andolana*, a weekly published from Dharwar, widened the horizon of their activities and views. Later it was published from Mysore, where it operates as the mouthpiece of Dalits.

Janapragati :

A progressive Kannada weekly published from Bangalore has been one of the staunchest supporters of the Dalit cause.

Edited by Kalle Sivothama Rao, a fearless Kannada journalist belonging to the backward Billava (Ediga) caste of South Kanara, *Janapragati* has a rich tradition of upholding many a Dalit cause. It gave full support to every Dalit leader e.g. while Basavalingappa, L. G. Havanur, N. Rachiah, R. D. Kittur, Justice Bhimiah of the Karnataka High Court reeled under the attack of the upper castes. A number of Dalit writers were brought to light through the columns of *Janapragati* which also had a column devoted to the rationalist thoughts of Periyar Ramaswamy. *Janapragati* is the most popular weekly in Karnataka devoted to the cause of Dalits, minorities and backward classes.

Shudra :

A monthly edited by Mr. Srinivas, a young teacher attached to a private school in Bangalore, *Shudra* is solely devoted to literary and cultural issues apart from left-oriented subjects. A dedicated youth, Srinivas has been a relentless campaigner for the Dalit cause through the pages of his journal which, apart from financial worries and constant harrassment from the police, he runs at great personal risk. He has organised innumerable meetings, seminars, study classes to focus attention on the plight of the Dalits and has been responsible for publishing the works of many a Dalit poet and writer in the columns of *Shudra*.

V. Dalit Cinemas

The Dalit movement in Karnataka as reflected in political, social and literary spheres had its impact on the cinema also. Kannada cinema, now fairly well-developed, contributed three important pictures to the Dalit cause, namely, *Bhagya Jyoti*, *Kaveri* and *Chomana Dudi*, the last having won nationwide acclaim based as it is on the famed novel of the same name by Shivaram Karanth, a Kannada novelist.

All the three pictures blatantly highlight the increasing atrocities of the higher castes on Harijans. They reveal the plight of the untouchables, exposing the true extent of their

poverty, their feeling of hopelessness over their inability to own the land which they cultivated, their abject bondage to land-owners, their overall misery and the mischief done to them by the priests in temples.

Film-maker H. N. Reddy of *Kaveri* may have been the target of criticism for having allegedly attacked one single caste and there may have been complaints that Brahmins alone are not the sole perpetrators of crimes against the untouchables. Though there is some truth in this charge, a film that aims at social reform will be able to impress the masses only when it embodies polarisation by choosing the castes that form the two extremes of the social hierarchy—the Brahmins at the apex of the caste pyramid and the untouchables at the base carrying the whole weight of the Hindu society on their backs. Therefore, according to many critics. H. N. Reddy was fully justified in selecting these two castes, and suggesting that reform should begin from the level of the Brahmins, i.e., from the very originators of the caste system. Progressive sections among Brahmins also welcomed the movie after having realised that despite their social status and mastery over Vedic literature, a sizable section among them continued to be poor. There were also suggestions in the Press that the films *Kaveri* and *Bhagya Jyoti* did great service to the Dalit cause and that the Government should give awards to such movies that exposed the evils of untouchability and demanded social reform.

In *Chomana Dudi* the plot revolves round Choma, a poor untouchable of coastal South Kanara. His cherished desire is to own a piece of land belonging to his Brahmin landlord one day. But the Hindu dharma forbids an untouchable from owning the land. An important aspect of the film is the presence of Christian missionary activity among the untouchables. The Harijan conversion to Christianity has been always a means of escape from the social and economic subjugation the untouchables suffer under Hinduism. In portraying the Christian *padri*, director B. V. Karanth has painted him a proselytiser rather than as a welfare worker among a backward community. In fact, the Christian missionaries have to their credit many records of selfless service to the untouchables

and Government authorities themselves have testified to this fact. (Mother Theresa is one outstanding example.) Unfortunately B. V. Karanth ignores this and tries to paint the missionaries black.

One of the criticisms against the movie is that *Chomana Dudi* tries to propagate the Jan Sangh point of view by idolising Hinduism and denouncing Christianity. Choma would rather die than give up Hinduism, (though in reality untouchables are actually outside the four-fold caste system of Hinduism and are hence outcastes), and embrace Christianity even after seeing his son leading a happy life after conversion and marriage to a Christian. Apart from this bit of misconstruction, the movie has done great service to the Dalit cause. Though the film may have been based on a novel written in the 1940s, much of what is shown in the film is still true of Dalits in rural Karnataka. The untouchables of South Kanara still do not possess land and hence the Land Reforms Act has failed to benefit them since they are all agricultural labourers and quite a number of them 'bonded labour'.

VI. Cultural Revolution

This in short is the picture of Dalit literary and cultural activity in Karnataka which is still far behind the neighbouring Maharashtra where Dalit literature has made gigantic strides in recent years. One of the reasons for the big spurt in Dalit literature in Maharashtra is the encouragement and support it got from the local Press. But this is not the case in conservative Karnataka which, unfortunately, has remained sterile while all its four neighbouring States have had a bumper crop of Dalit, Leftist and Rationalist thoughts blooming on its fertile soil. It is a sad commentary on the State of Karnataka particularly the erstwhile princely part of it in which the capital city of Bangalore is located. The main problem in Karnataka is with its Press which has stifled all progressive thought.

What the Dalits need more than education is a cultural consciousness. Any fresh thought toward social change emanating from cinemas, dance and drama is of utmost

importance. Since illiteracy is practically cent per cent among the Dalits, they will have to depend solely on these cultural media that are visual. The greatest stress, therefore, should be laid through the cultural media on a 'cultural revolution' of the Dalits. In this connection, the Dalit writers cite the example of the American blacks who discovered their soul and identity through jazz. Why do not Dalits similarly take up singing, drama and music? In fact, the Dalits have some of their own special musical instruments, drums, cymbals and dholak. And nothing will thrill the Dalits more than their robust music and dance for which they are so famous. In order to instill a sense of self-respect among the Dalits the use of cultural media is best. It is now unanimously agreed that political freedom has not brought economic and social freedom to the majority of Indians and particularly to the Dalits. If the fruits of freedom have failed to reach the masses, it is because the country still suffers from several disabilities—the greatest of which are illiteracy and caste.

What India needs is a new culture that gives new meaning and definition to literature, the concept of justice and injustice, right and wrong. This is possible only through a 'cultural revolution'.

In China, Mao discovered that the fruits of the 1949 revolution did not reach the masses because of the bourgeois culture and he therefore launched the 'cultural revolution' which demolished the old and outdated values. India too needs a 'cultural revolution' as envisaged by the Dalit writers. It is only through such a revolution that the country can annihilate the existing value system and build a new society free from poverty and the exploitation of the caste system. Otherwise, it will prove impossible for all governmental efforts towards the welfare of Dalits to percolate to the bottom, because of the hindrance caused by obsolete cultural values.

Dalit literature is considered the vanguard of such a 'cultural revolution'.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF THE HAVANUR COMMISSION

I. The Backward Classes Commission

If Basavalingappa put steel into the backbone of the Dalits, it was Laxman G. Havanur, the eminent jurist and sociologist, who, for the first time, provided intellectual leadership to the Dalit movement in Karnataka. He also made it more broad-based and added numerical strength to the movement by bringing the 'backward classes' into the surging sea of Dalits. The 'Backward Class Movement', which had hitherto remained a mere 'anti-Brahmin movement' of high caste Shudras in Karnataka, was now converted into a real tough crusade of Dalits under Havanur's leadership. And with the publication of what is universally hailed as the 'Bible of the Backward Classes' or the historic 3,000 page, four-volume report of the Karnataka Backward Classes Commission headed by Havanur in 1975, the Dalit movement is sure to gain further momentum being fully equipped now with well documented intellectual armour.

Havanur is, therefore, considered the pioneer of a movement that united under one single Dalit umbrella, all the suppressed and oppressed communities, which together formed a staggering 60 per cent of Karnataka's three-crore population, providing a sociological and ideological thrust to what had hitherto essentially remained a toothless anti-Brahmin movement. As literacy continues to rise even at the current snail's pace, the problem of unemployment becomes more acute and caste conflicts get sharpened. The Dalits are bound to exert pressure sooner or later and assert their Constitutional rights. If they are disappointed, tempers may flare and the impatient among them may even resort to violence. The Havanur Commission has given the storm signal and those who fail to heed it will do so at their own peril.

To Havanur this was his life's mission. He launched the struggle way back in 1956—shortly after the Kaka Kalelkar Commission report was published by the Government of India. This was perhaps the very first attempt in the history of the country to unite scheduled castes, tribes and backward classes of all the five States which had been proposed to be integrated to form the new State of Karnataka. A veteran fighter, Havanur was the first man in the country to challenge in 1963, the Constitutional validity of the Mysore Government G.O. classifying individuals as backwards. Justice K. S. Hegde of the Karnataka High Court had paid high tribute to Havanur and directed the State Government to take 'caste' as one of the factors for determining 'Backward Classes'. But the Nijalingappa Government gave a go-by to the Court order. Havanur was not deterred. He continued his struggle by writing a book on the Backward Classes Movement in 1964 for which Justice Gajendragadkar had declined to write a foreword.

Having realised that the legal battle has failed to influence the dry and cold-blooded judges, the communal-minded bureaucracy and the ambitious politician, he thought it was high time that the Dalits were whipped out of their centuries old slumber. 'Dalit Kranti Dal' a non-party organisation was formed in 1969 with the objective of mobilising weaker sections. It had its first conference in Bangalore (1969) under the Presidentship of N. Rachiah, a noted Dalit leader. Havanur was nominated general secretary and Basavalingappa, M. Mallikarjunaswamy and K. H. Ranganath were made Vice-Presidents. The Conference inaugurated by M. Govinda Reddy demanded :

- (1) Appointment of a Backward Classes Commission.
- (2) Halt to 'atrocities against Harijans' and
- (3) Enforcement of Directive Principles of the Constitution.

The long-awaited announcement about the Constitution of the Backward Classes Commission in 1972 came as a great relief to all the Dalits and Havanur who had devoted his lifetime to the cause of the Dalits was appropriately chosen to

be Chairman. The South Zone Conference of the Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, Tribes and Minorities inaugurated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 28, 1973 in the historic Lal Bagh Glass House became a milestone in the history of the Dalit movement. The Conference, the brain-child of Kempraj Urs, brother of Chief Minister Devraj Urs, enabled the voice of the Dalits to be heard at the national level for the first time. Havanur played a prominent role at the Conference.

Although Devraj Urs, considered a 'champion of the backward classes', handpicked Havanur for this strenuous job of heading the Commission, secret preparations were going on to quietly sabotage the whole effort. 'Vested interest among Brahmins, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, demanded my resignation on trivial grounds. These vested interests, having found full support in a major section of the Press which deliberately distorted my public speeches, demanded my resignation both inside and outside the Legislature', Havanur said in an interview to this writer. 'They managed to raise a privilege motion inside the Legislature and not satisfied with that, they sought Government permission to prosecute me. The permission was in fact given without notice to me. When I filed my objection to the Government, the same was withheld and in fact, I was asked orally by some cabinet ministers if I am prepared to prosecute H. D. Deve Gowda (Old Congress), Opposition Leader in the State Assembly. I said I have forgiven Gowda and the matter ended there', he added.

Like all Dalit leaders Havanur had to face gruelling experiences—political, administrative, judicial, economic—of every type. It is indeed a miracle how he could find time to concentrate on the Commission work in the face of adversity and acute mental agony. Nevertheless, weathering the storm he completed the monumental report in a short period of time, single-handed. The forces opposed to him and the Dalits resorted to all sorts of tactics and acts to sabotage the work of the Commission. Havanur added: 'The vested interests in right wing political parties silently infiltrated into the Congress during the split and instigated a member of the Commission by holding out promises to indulge in acts of

sabotage. And indeed K. H. Patil, P.C.C. President, constituted a parallel backward class committee of his own with a view to frustrate the working of the Commission. I issued notices to Patil asking him to desist from using the smuggled material lest he be prosecuted. So, the material was not used.'

Sabotage efforts were not limited to the political arena alone where high caste persons stooped to the level of deploying stooges among the Backward Classes to play the role of agent saboteurs. In fighting these forces alone Havanur landed into one crisis after another. As a result of all this Havanur was finally expelled from the Congress Party for six years, on trumped up charges of hurling personal insults at K. H. Patil.

Pointing out that as long as the caste system persisted atrocities against them would continue, Havanur depreciated the attitude of the scheduled castes to depend on others to solve their problems. Havanur suggested rewriting the Constitution to bring about religious equality and keeping the offices in all religious institutions open to all classes including the scheduled castes. The problem of these classes was not just an economic but a social one being an off shoot of religious problems, he said.

What the Constitution had removed was the disability arising out of untouchability practised in Hinduism and not the cause which was the caste system, he said. Prof. M. D. Nanjundaswamy urged the scheduled castes to 'demolish' the economic system which gave them no job opportunity and to seek an alternative.¹

Pilloried in the Press and in public, expulsion from the party was the price Havanur had to pay for taking up the Dalit cause. He was literally hounded from pillar to post, made to face all sorts of humiliations, his close relatives victimised, and he and his family made to face economic ruin. With his practice at the bar having come to a halt because of his preoccupation with the Commission work, he had no other

¹ *Indian Express*, December 23, 1974.

income with which to support his huge family. In spite of these difficulties Havanur produced a remarkably competent and scholarly report.

Deccan Herald : (November 24, 1975) carried the following report headlined : 'Havanur panel not deterred by hurdles.'

Bangalore : 'Vested interests tried their best to sabotage the working of the Karnataka Backward Classes Commission, which, however, brushed aside all hurdles and successfully accomplished its task, Mr. L. G. Havanur, Chairman of the Commission, averred here today.

'Participating in the "Meet the Press Programme" of the Karnataka Union of Working Journalists, Mr. Havanur said in the completion of the Commission's work he was inclined to see the fruition of his life's mission.'

As a person born in a community of hunters, one of the most backward communities in North Karnataka, Mr. Havanur said he had suffered all humiliations inherent in the hierarchical caste system and had grown up as a rebel against the system. It was his ambition throughout to be able to play some role in securing socio-economic justice to all oppressed classes. He got that opportunity in the Chairmanship of the Backward Classes Commission, which he took up in all earnestness and tried to do a thorough job. The Commission, he asserted, had approached the problem with a clear perspective. Drawing a lesson from the fate of a previous Commission on Backward Classes in the country, he said that he had made a rational approach to the subject so that the recommendations could stand judicial scrutiny.

But in spite of all the care taken in formulating the recommendation none could guarantee how the judiciary would view those recommendations. In this context, Mr. Havanur advocated certain constitutional reforms and radical changes in the mode of selection of judges to High Courts and the Supreme Court to provide satisfactory safeguards to the interests of weaker sections. Sharing his sincere feelings about the 'unkind treatment' he received at the hands of some pressmen, Mr. Havanur said it had really pained him when

on certain occasions pressmen distorted his statements and had made defamatory remarks against him. He did not believe in retaliating to all these attacks but would only appeal to them to show greater understanding of the intensity of feeling in persons of his background, who, like him, were unable to sugarcoat expressions.

It was indeed a miracle how he brought out the report despite opposition. The Commission started off with tremendous teething trouble and in an interview with C. V. Rajagopal, one of the few sympathetic reporters in the Bangalore Press, Havanur has given a vivid description of his initial difficulties : 'The Commission began in a two-room office in Vidhana Soudha and within 3 months we were asked to vacate even this. With the help of one steno, I myself prepared the questionnaire. A lady was appointed Commission Secretary, but she had no knowledge of Kannada. After four months some staff started trickling in. It took 8 months to get a phone and one and a half years to get some furniture for the office. Until then I took a chair from my house. Some Government departments did not co-operate. Some others took no interest in replying to the questionnaire. Even a major work like the socio-economic survey had to be undertaken by the Commission itself. For one and a half years, the Commission had no Secretary. Still, out of the Rs. 4 lakhs allotted to the Commission, Rs. 2 lakhs were returned after finishing the work.'²

Powers of court under the Commission of Enquiry Act were conferred after one full year of its appointment. What more proof is needed to reveal the heartlessness of the bureaucracy? In the covering letter to the Commission report Havanur has admitted that the entire report was prepared 'without an iota of assistance' from any member of the Commission. The only thing that he had to do was to read over a thousand books in order to lend authority to his treatise. In spite of all these hurdles, the report turned out to be a historic document. The Havanur report will remain as an authentic guide to action—not only for the Dalits of Karnataka but for the country as a whole.

² *Prajavani*, March 30, 1976.

Amid tumultuous scenes of joy and fulfilment in the Vidhana Soudha on November 19, 1975, Chief Minister Devraj Urs received the Havanur Commission Report and describing it as the 'Bible of the Backward Classes' vowed to implement its 'historic recommendations' as early as possible. In an emotion-packed speech delivered after accepting the 3,000 paged 'mighty report' from Havanur, Urs hailed the report as the 'most exhaustive and scientific document' ever produced in the annals of the country. 'Chief Ministers and Ministers may come and go but the Havanur Commission Report will remain for ages to come. Hence I say it is the Bible of the Backward Classes of India', he said amid cheers. Naturally, the cynosure of all eyes was Mr. Havanur, the eminent jurist who declined the post of a High Court Judge to complete the task of the Commission. He weathered all controversies including expulsion from the ruling party. Having devoted his entire life to the cause of the backward classes, it was a great day of fulfilment for him. As he read out the last few paragraphs of his welcome speech, overcome by emotion Mr. Havanur broke down in tears, fumbling for words.³

Devraj Urs, in his speech, pinpointed the new interpretation given by Havanur to the concept of equality. This was something novel and sounded highly reasonable. According to this principle differential treatment of backward classes alone could give equality of opportunity for all classes and castes. Equality of opportunity in absolute terms for unequal castes meant aggravation of inequality. Differential treatment of backward classes, particularly in education and services is prescribed because the Constitution-makers found that the backward classes are social groups who are classified, and their classification recognised by our society. Castes which are unequal cannot be made equal by treating them equally. The Chief Minister said that it was but natural that people who had been enjoying all the privileges and properties would feel worried that they stood to lose by this principle of equality. But such advanced castes must understand that 'one man's gain is another man's loss.' Unless the advanced

³ *Indian Express*, November 20, 1975.

castes and classes are ready to forego certain of their privileges and properties how could social change be brought about? He reminded those who had vested interests, of the bloody revolutions that shook various countries. 'Do you want such bloodshed here? If the advanced sections think they can prevent this social change and if they are confident that they know the political tactics better than the uneducated backward class they are thoroughly mistaken', he said. 'Haves must give up for the sake of have-nots'. (More cheers.)

Mr. Chandrajit Yadav, then Union Steel Minister and a backward class leader from U.P. who was also present paid tribute to, and urged the implementation of, the Havanur Commission. 'I call it a red-letter day in the history of Karnataka.'

Mr. Rachiah, then Minister for Social Welfare, said that after the death of Dr. Ambedkar, Mr. Havanur would go down in the history of the country as the greatest leader of the Backward Classes. He suggested that a judicial commission be formed to punish officials and the judicial officers if they failed to carry out the directives of the Government.⁴

II. Commission Recommendations

Addressing a Press Conference after presenting the report Havanur said about 45% of Karnataka's 3-crore population (excluding scheduled castes and tribes) have been declared 'backward classes' by the Commission. Five tests have been prescribed to determine the backwardness of a caste. However, even if a caste were to pass only one test it could still be considered backward. The five tests are: economic, residential, occupational, educational and the 'caste' meaning the status in the hierarchy. According to the Commission, Vokkaligas and Lingayats are not castes but 'communities' comprising several 'castes'. However, Brahmins are the only ones who come under one 'caste'. By this it meant that the entire Lingayat and Vokkaliga population—the two dominant communities of the State, are not declared backward. Some sections of them may be considered advanced.

⁴ *Indian Express*, November 20, 1975.

The Havanur Commission has rejected the much-maligned caste criterion.

‘Our Commission has not gone on the criterion of caste in deciding the social backwardness of castes and communities. However, so far as only a few of the ‘backward tribes’ are concerned, whom the State Government has already treated as denotified or nomadic tribes and about whom the population particulars are not available, we have applied the principle of caste. Some of those tribes belong to Hindu community and some to Muslim community.’⁵

Referring to the ‘social and educational backwardness’ the Commission squarely blames the caste system for the existing state of affairs in the country.

‘We have discussed earlier, in brief, how the Hindu society has been devitalised by the corroding effects of caste. Stratification of Hindu society into hierarchical caste groups has resulted in untouchability. Taboos on food and drink are generally observed by all Hindus in rural parts. The rule of endogamy has perpetuated caste system. Although modern conditions are obliterating some of the caste practices, caste system as such is powerful. Caste operates in almost every conceivable activity in social life. Reformist movements in the past have not made any appreciable influence on Hindu society. Required efforts have not been made for the removal of untouchability and the undesirable features of the Hindu social system. Achievement of fusion of all Hindu castes into a single homogeneous community appears an impossibility. The rigours of caste inequalities and untouchability prevail in an intensified manner in the villages, though in towns and cities, caste distinctions are less rigorous. This unhealthy trend is bound to continue until the caste system is abolished. There is no possibility at least in the foreseeable future, of the abolition of caste system. It is for this reason that the Constitution makers provided for only equalisation of all castes by removing economic inequalities and social discriminations. As one of the measures of equalisation, Constitution by Article 17 abolished the practice of untouchability, and by Article 15 provided for removal of social discriminations. Neither the advanced castes nor the depressed and backward castes have an urge to annihilate caste system.’⁶

⁵ *Karnataka Backward Classes Commission Report*, Vol. I, Part I, Chapter XXV, Para. 1, p. 307.

⁶ *Karnataka Backward Classes Commission Report*, Vol. I, Part I, Chapter XXV, Para. 28, p. 312.

Gloomy Picture : On the basis of the data collected in the course of the socio-economic survey, the statistics on educational attainment at high school level, the evidence of hundreds of witnesses supported by the impressions gained through personal interviews, the Commission has painted a gloomy picture of Dalits in the State :

- (i) ' The majority of the people belonging to castes and communities specified by us are residing in rural, isolated and segregated areas.
- (ii) Their economic condition is so poor that the majority of the castes and communities are incapable of owning land, house or other property.
- (iii) Occupation in which they are engaged are very unremunerative and they do not get adequate returns for their labour. Their occupations are considered unclean or inferior and therefore, low.
- (iv) People of the advanced castes and communities entertain prejudice against them.
- (v) Low status or inferiority associated with their castes makes it difficult for members of the backward classes to have access to places of cultural training, or to have religious and secular education.
- (vi) Many of the castes and communities have been segregated from the advanced communities due to social taboos against inter-dining and inter-marriage, and against similar opportunities of association.
- (vii) Backward classes are being prevented from enjoying status in society due to the age-old social customs.
- (viii) Due to their habitation in rural areas and segregated and isolated places, their economic poverty, their inferior and unremunerative occupations, unhealthy conditions in which they are living, absence of contact with the advanced communities and prejudice in the minds of advanced communities, backward classes have developed apathy for education. The

absence of adequate number of educational institutions in rural areas has also contributed to their educational backwardness.

- (ix) There are no residential hostel facilities for the members of the backward classes either in rural areas or in urban centres. They do not have resources to open educational institutions and provide hostel facilities to the members of their own castes and communities, as is done by the advanced communities.
- (x) Government also has not cared hitherto to open required number of schools, colleges and free hostels in the rural areas to encourage students belonging to the backward classes.
- (xi) Government policy of sanctioning larger number of high schools and colleges to private agencies to meet the increasing demand made by the advanced communities has aggravated educational disparities between the advanced castes and backward castes.
- (xii) The method of selection of students at every level for promotion to the higher standard and course of study on the so-called theory of merit has cut at the roots of the very sources supplying students belonging to backward castes and communities. The merit theory has acted as a damper on these communities to pursue further studies.
- (xiii) Occupational, environmental and economic conditions have resulted in many drop-outs from the backward castes and communities and they have also contributed to the stagnation of students.
- (xiv) The non-co-operative and discouraging attitude of some of the educational institutions founded and managed by certain castes and communities has not helped the educational advancement of backward castes and communities.
- (xv) The present system of education has not at all helped the backward castes and communities.

- (xvi) The scheme of compulsory primary education has not attracted and enrolled proportionate number of students between the age group of six and fourteen from the backward castes and communities.

Note.—We have not adopted the traditional approach of treating a class as socially and educationally backward on the ground of its inadequate or absence of representation in State services. In our opinion, the inadequate or absence of representation is the result of its social and educational backwardness, and not the cause.’⁷

Of the 205 ‘castes’ that the Commission could distinguish in Karnataka, 197 have been declared ‘backward’ and will thus be entitled for reservations both in Government services and admissions to educational institutions.

Besides, six other ‘castes’ that will enjoy only educational concessions but no job reservations are : Satanis (a traditional priestly class among the Brahmins), Arasus, Balijas, Rajputs (who have claimed Kshatriya status), Devadigas of South Kanara and the Ganigas.

The Commission has found backward and advanced, rich and poor in every Hindu caste including the dominant castes like the Brahmins, Lingayats and Vokkaligas who have been traditionally considered advanced.

However, the only exception to this rule found by the Commission are the Bunts of South Kanara who have been, therefore, found advanced. Nor was there any representation from this caste to declare it as backward, Havanur said.

Though the Lingayats, the single biggest dominant community in the State forming 14.64% of its 3-crore population have been traditionally considered forward, the Commission found quite a large number of very backward sub-sects among them. In fact, the Lingayats, born out of a protest movement against the Hindu religion, and its obnoxious caste system, have remained a mere replica of the Hindu religion with all

⁷ *Karnataka Backward Classes Commission Report*, Volume 1, Part 1, Chapter XXV, Para 31, sub para i to xvi.

the features of the caste system intact. Hence the Lingayats can never be considered a single 'caste' but a group of castes embracing all the Hindu castes including its untouchables. The lower castes who had embraced Veerashaivism continued to remain backward even to this day, the Commission said.

A most startling discovery of the Commission, is that rural Karnataka has hardly evidenced any change since independence. 'The caste structure has remained well entrenched in every nook and corner' of the State. Those who may outwardly profess that they have no religion and no caste persist in marrying only from within their caste. Besides this many of them 'secretly enter into conspiracy against those who do not belong to their caste and look upon others with suspicion, distrust and hatred,' the Commission said observing the historic role played by caste and how it is considered as a political asset. 'Caste system which has been there since 3,000 years continues even to this day despite many attempts to destroy it.' Remarking caustically against some of the Indian sociologists who have remained armchair critics the Commission states, 'They are only concerned about research into the lives of the low castes and how they have gone up the ladder in the course of social mobility but fail to refer to the great heights to which high castes have reached.'

The Commission also explodes the widely held theory that in the urban areas the caste system is disappearing. On the other hand it found caste discrimination well entrenched in the urban areas where low castes are hounded out of jobs and educational institutions and others severely discriminated against.

Another major recommendation of the Commission is the revision of the scheduled caste and tribes list. Since quite a number of 'touchable' Hindu castes are included in this list, the Commission has urged a revision of this list to exclude these touchable castes.⁸

Directive Principles Fundamental. The Commission made a major recommendation of far-reaching importance pertaining

⁸ *Indian Express*, November 22, 1975.

to a vital constitutional amendment that could automatically better the lot of the country's 'backward classes'. It said that the 'directive principles' in the Constitution be converted into 'fundamental rights'. For instance the fundamental rights to acquire and to hold property, which are superior, are exercised only by the propertied upper castes and the rights to a living wage, which are not exercisable on the ground of their inferior character belong to the poor and the lowly castes. 'There will be no claim for protective discrimination and compensatory treatment by any class of citizens and perhaps ours will be the last commission in India on backward classes, if Article 37 is amended making the Directive Principles also enforceable through courts', according to Havanur. Indeed, the power of judicial review would be widened because the large mass of poor people would also invoke judicial intervention. If the concept of 'castelessness' would promote both the fundamental rights and the directives, present conflict between Parliament and Judiciary about supremacy will also end.

The basic approach of the Backward Class Commission is realisation of economic equality by all 'castes' and not just 'individuals'. The resources of the State being limited, if we think of achieving this without 'caste', the poor among the dominant castes will knock off all the benefits at the cost of the poor among the backward classes. 'Hence economic equality meant economic equality of all the castes and in the present context, I am not for the annihilation of the caste but for only equalisation of castes', he said with a deep insight into the complicated nature of the country's problem.

Population-wise Reservation—Another major recommendation of the Havanur Commission is the population-wise reservation. It has urged distribution of Government jobs and places in educational institutions on the basis of the population of each caste. The principle behind this novel approach is that since the Hindu society is based on a hierarchical caste system, the same pattern must be reflected in Government jobs and admission to educational institutions. No single caste shall monopolise the limited resources of this State. If this new principle is accepted the entire complexion of the

State may undergo a revolutionary change. The following is the percentage of prominent castes among the State's three-crore population. Brahmins who form 4.2 per cent of the population occupy 20 per cent of Government posts; Lingayats 14.64 per cent (including all the numerous sects and sub-sects); Vokkaligas 11.88 per cent (including all the different castes); Kurubas 6.77 per cent and Bedars 5.06 per cent (the two single largest undivided castes); Bunts 0.68 per cent. Scheduled castes and tribes form 14 per cent of the State population but get 19 per cent constitutional reservations. Among the scheduled castes, the Commission found 101 castes. Some non-scheduled Hindu castes were found to be more backward than scheduled castes. To the great disadvantage of the commission, caste-wise information about Government employees and students were not available since the census authorities had stopped collecting caste-wise information in the forties. The Commission, therefore, addressed letters to different agencies including the 11,000 primary schools and high schools calling for caste-wise information. There was a good deal of resistance to this move. Certain departments and the judiciary totally denied this information.

III. Dalits Have No Future

Laxman Gulappa Havanur, (born 1925), a tribal belonging to the Beda-Nayak sub-sect, will go down in the history of Karnataka as one of the greatest of Dalit leaders. The very fact that hundreds of caste conferences were held after the Havanur Commission was formed proves that he has brought about tremendous awakening among the Dalits much to the chagrin of the high castes. Even the Brahmins and Lingayats held separate caste conferences lest they be left behind in this race.

Now that the upper castes have failed in their efforts to sabotage the Havanur Commission from producing a *magnus opus*, their next move will be watched with interest as well as concern. Already efforts are being made to scrap the report. A deliberate delay can also kill the efficacy of the report. And there are any number of people in the Govern-

ment, judiciary and political parties to oblige the vested interests.

K. M. Naganna, a Janata Party leader and Commission member and Kagodu Thimmappa, Socialist Party M.L.A., have already voiced their concern over the fate of the report.

Havanur is not optimistic about the future of his report or for that matter the future of the entire Dalits. In an interview he said that in India untouchables shall ever continue to be untouchables. The reason is that our religion inherently sustains inequality. And untouchability is the manifestation of this extreme form of inequality. Hence caste also will continue. Brahminism will survive in perpetuity and the present idea of secularism in India will encourage Hindu revivalism. 'My solution to destroy the caste system and untouchability is that all caste Hindus should initially contribute their men proportionate to their population to the occupations of scavenging, street sweeping, shoe-making, carrying dead animals, tanning hide etc. Unless there is downward occupational mobility, untouchability, and consequently, the caste system will not disappear. Dalit movements in Karnataka and South India have been sporadic and isolated attempts.' 'The future is bleak', he said as tears rolled down his cheeks. This writer asked him the following questions :

Question :

Do you find any hope in the Communist movement ?

Answer :

Havanur said that while the Dalits are divided amongst themselves, those with vested interests have calculatedly distributed themselves in all the political parties. And the communist parties are no exception to this rule.

Question :

What should we do when the future is bleak ?

Answer :

Just submit to the inevitable without stopping the fight against these forces. Otherwise, disparities and inequalities will go on increasing.

In his response to the above questions, Havanur highlighted the fundamental characteristic of our society and politics. Even the so-called progressive parties are not free from the evil consequences of caste. It is, therefore, up to the Dalits, according to Havanur, to fight the battle for justice and emancipation without any illusions about the other forces in the country.

CHAPTER V

REPUBLICAN PARTY AND SCHEDULED CASTE POLITICS

The demoralisation in the ranks of Dalits is fully reflected in the Republican Party of India—the country's only political party that directly represents the untouchables. Many of its leaders, like S. S. Arakeri, have joined the ruling party. So much so that the only leader of all-India stature left in Karnataka is C. M. Arumugham (born 1926), whose election from the Tamil-speaking Kolar Gold Field, bordering Tamil Nadu, was set aside by the Supreme Court and with it the Karnataka State Assembly lost its only R.P.I. member. Those left in the party which was formed in 1957 after the death of Dr. Ambedkar, are divided into two rival groups. Being a party of the poor and the downtrodden, lacking financial support and with large-scale defection to the ruling party, the R.P.I. presents a pathetic picture in Karnataka, as in the rest of the country. And this is also the picture of scheduled castes, in general, in the political arena.

The very fact that despite all these handicaps, the Party has still retained its influence in pockets viz. Bijapur, Gulbarga and Bidar, proves it retains an ideological hold on the untouchables. The R.P.I. takes active part in all the general elections and in elections to other bodies but invariably puts up a poor show since the untouchables by and large have been voting for the Congress.

Unlike in Maharashtra, in Karnataka the R.P.I. has no history of militancy or Buddhist conversion to bring about a cohesion between Dalits torn between several sub-sects. Nor did it emulate the example of S. P. Maurya, a militant and charismatic Buddhist Ambedkarite, under whose leadership the R.P.I. in Uttar Pradesh formed alliances with locally important Muslims. It was Shyam Sunder in Karnataka and B. P. Maurya in Uttar Pradesh who have proved the

efficacy of the ' Harijan-Muslim axis ' in the scheduled caste electoral politics. Unfortunately the R.P.I. in Karnataka has failed to experiment with this alliance.

The R.P.I. has thus an uphill task. And in days to come as the Harijan hunger for ' Congress crumbs ' increases, the R.P.I. may slowly fade out of politics unless it radically changes its policies. ' The electoral history of the Republican Party illustrates the hard facts of political life that have to be faced by any group of untouchables who seek power under their own leadership. First, they must obtain a substantial number of caste Hindu votes to win Normally they must win caste Hindu support as well as mobilising their own members. The risk they run is that the very activities they must engage in to mobilise their own supporters will alienate the caste Hindu voters, as the Republicans did in earlier elections.'¹

That is why no militant leader can spring up from among the untouchables who constitute the poorest and the most powerless castes. The caste Hindus and particularly those from the landed gentry will not tolerate any affront to their superior status—much less violence. The caste Hindus are too numerous, too well-entrenched, to be subdued by Dalit violence. They can retaliate more effectively backed by finance and muscle, with the Press and ' public opinion ' to support them. Compared to this, the Dalits are physically and financially weak and culturally deprived. If a Dalit protests, he may lose his life and not even his bones will be traced and the news hushed up. It is just not possible for a Dalit to be militant and at the same time contest an election in which high caste Hindu votes are always the deciding factor. And if ever an elected M.L.A. shows signs of militancy, he is sure not to get the Congress ticket for the next election. If by chance he does manages to get it, he will have had a hard time to win over the hostile upper caste leader who decides his fate in the election. A scheduled caste candidate, who is always financially weak, has to depend on high caste Hindus for everything and the Congress Party has fully exploi-

¹ Lelah Dushkin : *The Untouchables of Contemporary India*, University of Arizona Press, 1972, p. 201.

ted this abject helplessness. After the split Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has been heavily borrowing on the scheduled caste 'vote bank' which not only charges a very low interest and many a time no interest at all, but gives lavish advances. And with the establishment of 'scheduled caste cells' right from the A.I.C.C. downwards, the entire lot of Dalits are syphoned off inside the party—and made to wait for the Congress crumbs of bread.

Normally, the Congress ticket is given to a member of the scheduled caste or tribe who is meek, submissive, poor and uneducated and hence could be depended upon by high caste Hindus. And these legislators belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes normally have a second class status in the legislature or Parliament once the elections are over.

The poor voter turn-out in a reserved Assembly constituency also proves the apathy of the caste Hindus towards the candidates. Lelah Dushkin who has made a scientific study of this aspect observes that there is higher turn-out for unreserved seats and lower turnout for scheduled caste seats. The reason is that where a caste Hindu or a non-Hindu contests from a general seat, caste and religious issues throw-up sharp conflicts and competition is also keen. But in a reserved constituency caste Hindu voters have no such interest and hence the turn-out is also comparatively low. Miss Dushkin calls this 'voter indifference' a 'barometer of backlash', the expression of active resentment against Dalits and the system of reservations as a whole.²

Reserved Constituency—A Curse

Owing to all these factors the Republican Party of India in Karnataka and in the rest of the country presents a pathetic picture. And Arumugham and other non-Congress Dalit leaders have started feeling the effects of this. In an interview, Arumugham said : 'the Republican Party of India will have a better future in Karnataka and in India, if reserved constituencies are abolished forthwith. It is this reserved constituency that is the cause of disunity among the Dalits'.

² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Reserved constituency has thus proved a curse to the Dalits and a boon to the Congress. Such a virile race has become dispirited and lifeless. Only a separate electorate as demanded by Dr. Ambedkar and against which Gandhi went on his 'Epic Fast' (1932) would have brought out the real genius of the Dalits to the surface. They would need no longer be at the mercy of caste Hindus or depend on them for pelf and pity. The chaff will be blown away and only the grain will remain; the stooges of the high caste Hindus will not be elected. Since scheduled castes would constitute a separate electorate, they would vote only for a militant Dalit leader.

Now that there is no chance of fulfilling Ambedkar's cherished dream, it is high time the government abolished at least the reserved constituencies that have made scheduled caste politics meaningless. Many Congress M.L.A.s among scheduled castes subscribe to this view. Quite a number of them share B. P. Maurya's opinion, as quoted by Harold Isaacs, in his book, *India's Ex-untouchables*. 'This system does the scheduled caste no good because the people in the reserved seats belong to the party in power and are often incapable persons. Although they are educated, they dare not speak out against the party in power. They do not represent their people, the party and the Government, but represent the party in power to the people we say end these reservations. They are just a way of keeping the weaker sections weak'³

It is high time that at least the saner elements in the ruling party, think about this and bring justice to this section of the people. Our combined efforts in keeping the lid forcibly closed on the seething volcanic power of this downtrodden section may only spell doom. The volcano may erupt releasing the pent up forces of Dalit power, its burning lava sweeping through the country and washing away the accumulated dirt of centuries finally bringing about social change.

KGF : A City of Untouchables

While talking about the Republican Party and the scheduled caste politics we cannot forget the role played by Kolar Gold

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

Field. This mining town is a unique city with certain features unparalleled in the whole country. Nowhere else do we come across one whole city inhabited wholly by untouchables (population 2 lakhs) speaking one language (Tamil), wedded to one philosophy (Ambedkarism), supporting one party (Republican Party of India), voting for one leader (C. M. Arumugham), all employed till recently by one company the State-owned Bharat Gold Mine Undertaking.

However, K.G.F. presents a heart-rending picture of a mass of Dalits living under sub-human conditions. It is a shame that a Government of India company treats its workers (about 12,000) worse than animals, giving them one of the lowest pay scales in the country. Since the entire city is one single reserved constituency, the Republican Party of India is quite popular there and many landmarks have been named after Dr. Ambedkar. Arumugham is considered by mine workers as a 'living god'. And the Tamil-speaking Dalits being more virile than their Kannada counterparts, Ambedkar's flag still flies high in K.G.F. and the credit for this goes to Arumugham for maintaining K.G.F. as the stronghold of the R.P.I. Born the son of a miner, he started working as a clerk in the gold mine on a salary of Rs. 35 a month. After serving the gold mine for 11 years he finally resigned as foreman. A militant Ambedkarite, Arumugham entered politics in 1946 as Branch Secretary of the Scheduled Caste Federation of India which was dissolved in 1957. Twice elected to the State Assembly, Arumugham is a highly respected figure in the Karnataka politics and his fiery speeches in the State Assembly are listened to with rapt attention. But it is a misfortune that this brilliant Ambedkarite has confined himself to K.G.F. city without being able to influence the Dalits of his own district which has the State's highest concentration (24 per cent) of Scheduled castes. This is perhaps because he is Tamil-speaking and the city of K.G.F. has remained an oasis in the midst of the Telugu-speaking Dalit district of Kolar.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER DALIT VICTIMS OF CASTE POLITICS

‘ Kittur Incident ’

The ‘ Kittur incident ’ which became well-known all over India reveals how Dalit leaders are systematically hunted down by means of character assassination. As the culmination of a cleverly managed drama of high tension, R. D. Kittur, a young untouchable hailing from Belgaum district, resigned as Minister of State for Home in the Devraj Urs Government and it is indeed a misfortune that even to this day the public has not been officially informed about the truth behind the story which the national Press headlined : ‘ Minister and Missing Girl ’.

The incident burst on the national scene in the middle of May 1973 as a sensational front-page ‘ scandal involving Minister Kittur and a young Gujarati girl, Miss Sumitra Desai. Kittur found her waiting in his Bangalore residence on return from Delhi and when she started talking incoherently and also broached certain subjects the Minister’s suspicions,’ were aroused. He summoned a senior city police official Harlan- kar and asked him to send her to a home for mentally retarded persons in the outskirts of the city. Problems began from this point. After the police left her there Sumitra Desai was suddenly found ‘ missing ’. Strangely, the report of this mysterious disappearance appeared in only one Kannada daily published from Bangalore and the rest faithfully copied it the next day ; and the legislature led by Ramakrishna Hegde (Old Congress), leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, promptly exploited the incident connecting Sumitra Desai with Kittur, reading much meaning into the incident which was made to appear a major sex-scandal that could even result in a cabinet crisis. In the wake of this charge, a thoroughly confused Kittur promptly tendered his resignation and issued a statement denying any

connections with the girl—who following police investigations later turned out to be a person of suspicious character having connections with smugglers. Kittur was again taken into the Ministry after having been fully exonerated by Chief Minister Devraj Urs who was all the while convinced of his innocence.

There is also the case of Shivanna, another Dalit leader from Raichur, who was dropped from the Ministry, following some wild charges that later proved to be unfounded.

Rachiah—Another Victim

One of the latest cases is that of N. Rachiah who has become a red rag to the high castes. He is a senior leader hailing from what is termed the 'Left Harijans' a class of untouchables among untouchables. As a Cabinet Minister under B. D. Jatti and later under Devraj Urs, N. Rachiah had initiated several schemes for the welfare of Dalits much to the chagrin of upper caste representatives both within the Cabinet and without. It is normal to hurl 'corruption charges' against Dalit leaders and the Press obligingly gives wide coverage while the misdeeds committed by upper castes are passed by. N. Rachiah himself gave vent to these feelings which came out clearly in the following press report :

Bangalore : The Social Welfare Minister, Mr. N. Rachiah today hit out at his critics and alleged that a virulent campaign had been launched against him because he was a Harijan.

In a scathing attack on those who had criticised him and his department and a section of the local press which had published the Vigilance Commission reports, Mr. Rachiah charged that personal vendetta and communal bias were behind these things. Mr. Rachiah, who was replying to a debate in the Legislative Council on the working of his department said he would request the Chief Minister to institute an enquiry into the leakage of the Vigilance reports. 'Why are Vigilance Commission reports pertaining to other departments not published', he asked.

Mr. Rachiah spoke of the various measures he had taken to gear up his department and to tackle the problems confronting scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and said a section of the press had let loose a campaign against him.

With the blessings of Gandhiji, Harijans had become a force to reckon with, Mr. Rachiah said, and wondered why Harijans had been singled out for this kind of calumny. 'For how long

are we going to tolerate this', he asked. The Minister also claimed that reports appearing in a section of the press on February 2, were blatantly false and said that if proved wrong he would resign his ministership.¹

In the above statement he was referring to a front-page report in the *Deccan Herald* (March 25, 1976) headlined, 'Corruption spiced with vendetta'.

As an outspoken critic of the upper castes, Rachiah used to have regular fights within the Cabinet which was dominated by the landed gentry. Rachiah is quite disarming about corruption charges. He feels that when Ligayats and Vokkaligas can swindle co-operative societies which they control, of lakhs and crores of rupees and get away with it, have not the Harijans the right to pocket a few thousands? 'If you want to punish the corrupt, begin from the top', he says. This appears to be a frank analysis of the 'anatomy of corruption' under Indian conditions in which 'money corruption' is always magnified while 'caste corruption' is always ignored. After all, corruption has different faces and 'money corruption' is a small part of this.

The Chief Minister's analysis of the problem of corruption in India may also be noted in this connection.

Bangalore : Analysing the 'Anatomy of corruption', Chief Minister Devraj Urs point-blank told the Assembly today that as long as the existing system based on three major philosophies—social order built on the bedrock of caste system, political order based on parliamentary democracy, and the capitalist-feudalist-oriented economic order—continued no Government could fully eradicate corruption.

Corruption was not only merely what the people often heard, bribe-taking and some such money transactions. The gravest and the most serious corruption was 'caste corruption' about which little appeared in the Press. After all, the caste system was a peculiar system confined only to this country.²

The social phenomenon of corruption being part of our life in India did not spare even the Dalits, who have also inherited the common desire to 'get-rich-quick'. The

¹ *Sunday Standard*, March 28, 1976.

² *Indian Express*, March 23, 1973.

Vigilance Commission Report against ' Harijan hostels ' and the charges of corruption to which N. Rachiah referred above are all part of this.

Rachiah in spite of all the untruths told about him, will undoubtedly go down as one of the ablest Dalit leaders of Karnataka and his record of service as Minister for two terms will prove this. Unlike other ' Harijan leaders ', he is not afraid to speak out. Addressing the ' Seminar on Backward Classes ' (Sept. 29, 1973), he said : ' Our democracy is meant only to promote and protect the interests of higher castes and the dominant castes whose total population may be about 30% The higher caste people, who have dominated all the political parties in India, would only give false promises to the poor, backward caste people at the time of election. The moment they are elected, they never care for their promises So the prejudices between the higher castes and the lower castes in India are more deep rooted than the prejudices between the whites and negroes in America.'

Referring to the ' merit theory ', he said : ' Nowhere in any part of the Constitution do we find the word, "merit". The high caste people have devised the false word called merit, and they are projecting this word before the masses of India, that merit alone can decide the distribution of administrative power and the educational standard. This is most hypocritical ', he said, denouncing the so-called ' merit theory '. He made a number of suggestions before the seminar and said if they are not accepted by the Government, ' a civil war between the higher and the lower castes is inevitable '. As late as 1975, Rachiah still held the same view on merit theory. He sponsored a resolution at the Conference of Conveners of Scheduled Caste Cells of Pradesh Congress Committees and Ministers in charge of Social Welfare, convened by the A.I.C.C. in Delhi (*Indian Express*, October 21, 1975) that asked the Government to ' discard the merit theory which made marks as the sole criterion for admissions of scheduled castes and scheduled tribe students to educational institutions.'

Much of the glory of N. Rachiah's services to the cause of Dalits is dimmed as a result of the endless quarrel between

him and his younger brother, T. N. Narasimha Murthy, Deputy Chairman of the Legislative Council, which unfortunately was made public not only on the floor of the legislature but also dragged into the High Court. This dispute between the two brothers Narasimha Murthy and Rachiah is being used by the upper castes to create more confusion in the Dalit ranks. But being culturally deprived and caught in the coils of the Congress, the Dalits can hardly see through the political game of divide and rule.

CHAPTER VII

ATROCITIES ON HARIJANS

As late as April 1975, the Union Government admitted in Parliament that atrocities on Harijans in several States 'are on the increase' despite various Government checks. Deputy Home Minister F. H. Mohisin replying to a call attention notice on the burning of Harijan houses and murder of three Harijan children in a Bihar village, said : 'Such incidents of atrocities deserved condemnation. It is regrettable that despite our efforts they are increasing.'¹

If this is the national picture, Karnataka is not far behind. The State Government had expressed its indignation many times :

Bangalore : Social Welfare and Development Minister N. Rachiah is incensed that even after 27 years of independence and despite the declared policy of the Government to protect the interests of weaker sections, 'atrocities against Harijans continue to persist and officials at the lower levels close their eyes to them'. Mr. Rachiah told pressmen here today that he was particularly pained by the atrocity committed by a landlord in Nanjangud Taluk against a Harijan woman, who was admitted to the hospital with severe head injuries.²

Harijan atrocities meaning persecution of untouchables by upper castes is not something that has suddenly come about. It has always been there, being a part and parcel of the Indian rural life where the landed gentry has a stranglehold on everything. What is new is that these incidents get press publicity now while five or six years ago, the press used to ignore these crimes as not being 'news-worthy'. It is only lately that these incidents are getting some press coverage. But it is also true, that even with the palpably slow socio-economic changes, untouchables have started asserting their

¹ *Deccan Herald*, April 16, 1975.

² *Deccan Herald*, December 17, 1974.

rights and this being strongly resented by the landed gentry leads to bloody clashes. With the entire hierarchy of officials and the police standing on the side of the powerful landed gentry, the crimes go mostly unreported and the few that are booked do not lead to convictions. On the other hand, there are instances of police filing cases against the very victims of caste oppression. Minister Rachiah cited one such instance :

Bangalore : A case of rioting and mischief filed against some Harijans of Harlur village in Hoskote Taluk on a complaint filed by a landlord who had encroached on their burial ground, was withdrawn recently through Government intervention.

Social Welfare Minister N. Rachiah, the District Social Welfare Officer, the Deputy Commissioner of Bangalore District, the Civil Rights Enforcement Cell of the State Police and the Superintendent of Police, Bangalore District, were instrumental in getting the case withdrawn.

The landlord Bassappa, had encroached on the Harijan burial ground to the extent of six guntas. When he tried to put up a bund on August 13, 1974 a Harijan woman protested and she was allegedly abused by the landlord. The police drew up a mahazar about the encroachment and booked a case against Basappa for alleged violation of the Untouchability Act.

On a complaint by the Harijans, the Tahsildar had measured the land and fixed boundary stone on October 14, but eviction was not done.

About 10 days later, according to a complaint lodged by the landlord before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, the Harijans allegedly formed an unlawful assembly and cut the bund.

The complaint, which was filed before the Magistrate in January 1975, said that the landlord had sustained a loss of about Rs. 2,000 because his ragi and mulberry crops had been inundated because of the cutting of the bund.

On the basis of this the police registered a case and filed a charge-sheet in February 1975.

The Harijans petitioned the Deputy Commissioner of Bangalore district who visited Harlur on April 24, 1974 and asked the Tahsildar to get the landlord to end the encroachment. He also arranged legal aid for the Harijans—perhaps for the first time in the district.

Meanwhile, the Social Welfare Minister and the Director of Social Welfare took up the cause of the Harijans and the Civil

Rights Enforcement Cell of the State C.I.D. conducted inquiries in the village. Both the cell and the Deputy Commissioner wrote to the Government suggesting that the case should be withdrawn.

The Superintendent of Police, Bangalore district, had in his report to the Government stated that there was a fit case for withdrawal of the prosecution of the Harijans and the case was withdrawn on March 18.

Both the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of the Civil Rights Enforcement Cell have suggested to the Government that a detailed inquiry be conducted into the actions of the Hoskote police in the matter.

A strange footnote : When a *Deccan Herald* reporter visited Harlur village yesterday, he found the landlord still in possession of the portion of the burial ground he had encroached on.³

No less a person than R. D. Basumatri, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Scheduled Caste and Tribes, has reported that 'atrocities against Harijans are more rampant particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar than in other States.'⁴

Karnataka Dalit leaders say most of the 'atrocities' go unreported since they occur in remote villages. The State Government had taken a number of steps including the authorisation of special powers to the police to deal with such cases, but as long as the police service does not have enough representation of Dalits, the atrocities continue on the same scale as ever. Shivram Moga, Republican Party leader from Gulbarga, gave vent to his feelings in an interview : 'Because of the Lingayat domination atrocities are increasing in the North Karnataka rural areas and since the police officers mostly belong to that community they simply support the landlords. One way of checking the crime is to increase the representation of Dalits in the police service particularly at the higher level'. This view is shared by many Dalit leaders and also by some senior police officers sympathetic to the Dalit cause.

³ *Deccan Herald*, April 2, 1976.

⁴ *Indian Express*, October 5, 1975.

Incidents in Colleges :

But what came as the greatest shock was the spread of anti-Harijan 'atrocities', so far confined to villages, to metropolitan Bangalore and other urban areas. This strangely happened in early 1975 in the Bangalore Medical College Hostel where high caste Hindu medicos singled out Dalit hostelmates for brutal attack. The police took no action even after the injured Dalits lodged formal complaints. The high caste Hindu medicos were led by a politically influential Vokkaliga :

Bangalore : Knocking on the doors of the rooms of the scheduled caste students, the goondas were alleged to have hurled abuses at them : 'Holeyaru, Madigaru. They are fit for scavenging and boot-polishing but are eating with us at our cost'.

Explaining their heart-rending situation to newsmen here today, the scheduled caste boarders said they would submit a memorandum to the Chief Minister and the Social Welfare Minister tomorrow, explaining their tale of woes. One of them angrily remarked : 'If this were to be the plight of the educated Scheduled Caste people in a metropolitan city under the very nose of the Government, they can imagine the treatment meted out to their illiterate brethren in rural areas.'⁵

The 'anti-Harijan' violence then spread to the Agriculture University hostel in Bangalore and here again the Dalit boys were mercilessly beaten up.

Bangalore : Victims of the Agriculture University clash were produced before newsmen here today by Social Welfare Minister Rāchiah to whom they had come to lodge a complaint after failing in their attempt to get relief either from the University authorities or the police.

The students specifically mentioned that about 50 high caste Hindu boys used cycle chains and iron rods to hit them. They told newsmen in the presence of the Minister that neither Mr. Subbayya, Director of Student Welfare of the U.A.S., nor the hostel warden, who were present at the time of the fight came to their rescue. Later, they lodged a complaint with the Yelahanka police. They told the Minister that the entire lot of Scheduled Caste students would not be able to attend classes fearing a threat to their lives.⁶

⁵ *Deccan Herald*, February 6, 1975.

⁶ *Indian Express*, February 8, 1975.

While Congress 'Harijan' legislators did not care to issue statements denouncing this violence in College hostels—much less come to their rescue—the only organisation that took some concrete steps was the newly-formed All-Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Tribes Welfare Organisation headed by A. S. Rajan, a militant Ambedkarite. At a Press Conference in Bangalore, he charged, 'all the political parties in the country, including, to some extent, the R.P.I., with betraying the Dalits' and said the atrocities committed on the scheduled castes and tribes throughout the country had made them lose their faith in elections. He also attacked the 'self-styled' leaders of their own communities and said they had become vested interests. These leaders, he said, had betrayed the exploited masses by staying away from the teaching and ideology of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Thanks to their apathy and inaction, he complained, the constitutional safeguards guaranteed to the scheduled castes and tribes remained only on paper. The caste Hindu administrative hierarchy, which had no 'inner sympathy' for these people, had seen to it that none of these safeguards were properly implemented.⁷

Rajan's organisation has brought to light a number of high caste Hindu atrocities against the Dalits in villages around Bangalore. The cases pertained to 'murder, cutting off limbs, destruction of crops and wells and huts'.⁸ But in view of the prevailing Emergency, Rajan's organisation, consisting mostly of educated left-oriented youth employed in Government and other public sector units, was not able to make much headway.

Untouchability has been operating despite its 'abolition' in the Constitution and the enforcement of anti-untouchability laws is painfully slow. According to the Elyaperumal Committee set up by the Government of India, the enforcement of the law on untouchability is made more difficult by the fact that many police officials, especially in the rural areas, where untouchability continues to be widely practised, are unaware even of the existence of anti-untouchability laws, says an

⁷ *Indian Express*, June 6, 1974.

⁸ *Deccan Herald*, Feb. 9, 1975.

Indian Express editorial (Nov. 21, 1974) and adds : ' The drive against untouchability cannot succeed without a multi-pronged attack on caste system.'

This appears to be the moot point. Untouchability cannot be abolished without abolishing caste and caste cannot be abolished as long as the Hindu religion remains what it is. It is for these reasons that all the steps taken against untouchability so far, by the Government, have remained only on paper while the stigma as such shows up in more and more wicked forms.

The Karnataka Government set up a special cell called the ' civil rights enforcement cell ' in the police force in October 1974 ' to investigate and report instances of violation, non-implementation, or partial implementation of legal provisions and executive orders extending various benefits to the weaker sections, in particular to the scheduled castes and tribes in the State '. But the police official heading this special cell reported that of the 133 anti-untouchability cases registered during 1974, only 18 had ended in convictions.⁹ And during 1975, of the 403 cases registered only 90 ended in convictions. Inspector-General of Police C. V. S. Rao referred to a wide range of anti-untouchability offences and all this proved that either the police have failed to tackle this great social problem or they have no heart to take up the task seriously. This is proved from the steady stream of complaints pouring from different parts of the State.

Sociological Roots :

Sociologists are of the opinion that the rising rate of high caste Hindu atrocities, would drive more and more untouchables to urban areas where their identity would get merged in the less rigid social atmosphere. Sociologists like Andre Beteille feel that caste conflicts between untouchables and upper caste Hindus over civic rights are likely to play an important part for some time to come. ' The new generation of Scheduled Caste is no longer in a mood to accept with resignation the civic disability imposed on them by the upper castes. Their contacts

⁹ *Indian Express*, Dec. 28, 1975.

with politicians and officials have given them a growing awareness of their rights as citizens of a democratic society and they are becoming jealous of the rights. A show of strength on their part is a likely source of violence in the rural areas where in spite of a superficial acceptance of democratic values, the structure remains by and large inequalitarian.¹⁰

Beteille draws attention to the new trend in the political scene in Karnataka, with emphasis shifting from outdated Brahmin versus non-Brahmin to Harijan versus non-Harijan as a reaction to the numerous concessions made to the Harijans by the Government.

Conflicts between untouchables and upper caste Hindus must be welcomed. Perhaps, conflict is a necessary condition for the articulation of the interests of the hitherto underprivileged section of the society. The Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra have shown the way.

Andre Beteille adds : ' In this context it is well to remind ourselves that there are deep cleavages within the backwards. It is likely that the most stubborn opposition against the attempts of Harijans to improve their social position will come from those who are immediately above them rather than from the top castes. It is a matter of common observation that competition for status is often most acute between segments which are structurally adjacent to one another. This is because such segments operate largely within the same social universe. It is for this reason that castes which are just above the line of pollution are more likely to be jealous of their privileges in relation to the Harijans than the Westernised upper strata of society.'¹¹

¹⁰ Andre Beteille, ' *Castes, Old and New* ', p. 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

CHAPTER VIII

CONVERSION : BLESSING OR CURSE

The problem of conversion either to Christianity, Islam or even to Buddhism is not as serious in Karnataka as it is in Maharashtra where according to one report over 60% of the untouchables have been converted to Buddhism.¹

Shivaram Moga, Republican Party Leader at Gulbarga, would like untouchables to embrace Buddhism but very little conversion had taken place in the Karnataka region. The total number of converts to Buddhism in Karnataka is estimated at 8,000.² Moga says : 'Buddhism will bring to the untouchables cultural richness which they have been deprived of all these years.' His party had built a number of Buddha Vihara in Hyderabad, Karnataka area, but so far it has had little impact on the untouchables. Conversion to Buddhism will bring about a striking change of attitude towards life among the Dalits, especially the youth. They will get rid of their age-old inferiority complex and will get a fresh sense of identity and a new confidence. The result is a new culture and a social renaissance.

The neo-Buddhists no longer believe in pre-ordained fate or in any other ancient rituals laid down in the Brahmin scriptures. The trend is to develop a scientific bent of mind. As far as economic status is concerned there might have been a marginal change after the conversion but the radical transformation from the blind faith of, and a liberation from, the Brahminical Hinduism is itself a great achievement. What the Dalits need first is social liberation. In Hindu India poverty is intertwined with social oppression. Oppression and poverty will have to be abolished together. Perhaps abolition of social oppression has a certain priority.

¹ Arun Sadhu, *Times of India*, November 15, 1975.

² *Ambedkar and Neo-Buddhist Movement*, CISRS, 1972.

Tamilian Untouchables

Those who were converted to Christianity in the Bangalore—Kolar—K.G.F. area, apart from the coffee estate areas of Malnad, are mostly the Tamil-speaking untouchables who have migrated from the neighbouring State in search of jobs. One-fifth of the mine-workers and their families, out of the 2 lakh population of the Kolar Gold Field, are Christians.

C. M. Arumugham, the local M.L.A. and a top Republican Party leader, said in an interview : ‘ These untouchables were converted to Christianity during the British regime. American and European missionaries were the first to give them education. The untouchables made a beeline for conversion to Christianity when these missionaries for the first time allowed them to enter churches—the prayer hall.’

According to him there were two main reasons for conversion : faith and poverty. He says that conversion is no solution because the converts continued to suffer the same humiliation and discrimination. The converts were transformed into a new caste.

The majority of the converted Dalits in K.G.F. belong to the Church of South India. In the North Arcot District of Tamil Nadu an establishment called, ‘ The American Arcot Mission ’, with the support and aid of the Americans, extended its activities to the K.G.F. area much earlier than the Catholics. And further, the bulk of the workers who were domiciled in K.G.F. about a century ago have most of their relatives in North Arcot and in one way or the other they have been influenced by the American Arcot Mission. That is the reason why the converted Dalits in K.G.F. belong mostly to the Church of South India.

Asked if there is any conversion to Islam among the K.G.F. workers, he said that neither the mosque nor any Muslim organisation is taking any interest in this respect. However, some Ambedkarites in K.G.F. have embraced Buddhism and a massive movement is afoot for such a conversion in K.G.F., he said. According to him, conversion to Christianity has diminished after Independence and more so after 1950 when

the Constitution came into being. There is practically no conversion to Christianity now from among the Dalits of K.G.F.

Asked if there is any enmity in K.G.F. between the converts and others, he said there is perfect harmony between the two sections. 'Conversion does not separate their living and locality. Even after conversion, they depend upon each other. Even in the villages where the conversion has taken place, they remain in the same locality. The converts and those remaining in the Hindu-fold remain together, living together from cradle to grave.'

What are the special amenities provided by the church to the converts? He said that there were no special amenities provided by the different churches to their followers except for the facilities for worship and guidance. There is no concession shown to believers by the churches even in schools run and managed by them.

He agreed with this writer that untouchability is practised even after conversion. 'Practice of untouchability is common among Christians in the rural areas. A Gowda Christian and a Gowda Hindu have the same standard and status in society just as there is similarity between a Harijan Christian and Harijan Hindu in their approach to society and the treatment they get. However, in K.G.F. the converts do not suffer the stigma of untouchability and it is so for all the workers. It has come to a point where it is beyond anybody's power to practise untouchability in Kolar Gold Fields.'

Arumugham is opposed to conversion. Further, these conversions should not be done with political motives. Unless the Brahmin religious leaders change their outlook, approach, methods and accept equality among Hindus, it will be difficult to stop conversion, he said.

Conversion indeed poses both a challenge and a threat to Brahminism. *Chomana Dudi*, the Kannada film version of Shivaram Karanth's novel of the same title, has portrayed this excellantly. The movie is clever propaganda against conversion. In this much-publicised film, one comes out of the cinema theatre with a clear impression that conversion is

something to be abhorred. And that no price is too high for this. Choma, the untouchable, is gloriously painted as the hero who dies an untouchable. He loves Hinduism much more than this life. The Brahmin landlord who frustrates Choma's life's ambition to own a piece of land in keeping with Hindu Dharma, is extolled. So is Choma, who spurning the offer of the Catholic priest to embrace Christianity, dies forlorn—all his hopes dashed and his family ruined. To the untouchable Choma, Hindu dharma—that had kept him an outcaste and subjected him to life-long humiliation and suffering—became more important than his own economic security and the well-being of the family.

There were a number of letters in the local press pointing out that the *Chomana Dudi* is just a clever projection of the Jan Sangh-R.S.S. Hindu revivalist view-point.

Under the leadership of Pejawara Swamy, one of the heads of the Udupi Madwa Peetha, the Jan Sangh-R.S.S. outfit has formed the Viswa Hindu Parishad which stands for the propagation of Hinduism (Brahminism). But so far, except for carrying on propaganda against conversion, there is no proof of either the Parishad or any other Brahmin religious leader trying to destroy the reason for conversion : namely, the caste system. Nor is there any evidence of the Brahmin religious leaders trying to woo back the converted Dalits.

Why do upper caste controlled political parties, like the Jan Sangh-R.S.S., oppose conversion? *Guna*, a noted Dalit writer of Bangalore,³ unravels 'the mystery behind conversion': 'It will be relevant to point out as to why the upper caste political organisations are opposed to conversion of people to Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. A large scale conversion took place only in the case of untouchables, who were destined to be outside the scope of Hinduism or Brahminism that goes with the four Varnas. The untouchables sought the illusory equality promised by the religions to which they were converted. Conversion meant disruption in the village economy. For instance, conversion to Christianity helped the untouchables who were tied up

³ *Origin of Caste*, p. 18.

to serfdom, to partially liberate themselves from illiteracy and social disabilities. It is a fact that casteism survives even after religious conversion. But the converts could avail themselves of the colonial educational facilities and sought to move to towns. As a result they often rebelled against the caste hierarchy in the villages. This caused the flight of agricultural labourers to urban centres who were mostly the untouchables in the villages. It gave a telling blow to the feudal grandeur of the village communities. Therefore, the upper caste leaders (even if they are outside the organisations like Jan Sangh), were compelled to throw some meagre concessions to the untouchables and work conscientiously against religious conversion. They firmly discourage untouchables from being converted to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism by refusing the converted untouchables the fringe benefits and concessions which they offered to the non-convert untouchables. The converted untouchables are excluded from the list of Scheduled Castes. Meanwhile they have cleverly manipulated, by all available means at their disposal, to avoid the untouchables getting more concessions and representation in the Parliament and State Assemblies. They know that the untouchables will upset the political balance if they get more and more enlightened and if they are drawn into politics. So they play with the census of the population of the oppressed castes', says *Guna*.

While the Christian missionary organisations have set up a chain of hospitals, educational institutions and also organisations to serve deaf, dumb, blind, and the disabled, the Brahmin religious leaders, with enormous wealth accumulated in temples, have so far done nothing comparable to render any humanitarian service.

CHAPTER IX

RESERVATIONS—TELL-TALE FIGURES

‘Constitutional reservations’ have reduced the whole mass of Dalits into beggars who endlessly wait for the crumbs doled out by upper caste Hindus. At the current pace of the country’s progress, the Dalits will be driven more and more to the wall with upper caste Hindu prejudices already reaching serious proportions against the twin ‘reservations’ in admission to educational institutions and in recruitment to jobs. The Government and the upper caste politicians will go on publicising their charity to ‘Harijans’ and committee after committee will continue to give glowing accounts of ‘Harijan welfare’. The Dalits may also get some extra funds for this grand charity show. But what is the ultimate result? On the one side, the Dalits are reduced to the level of beggary and on the other side, the upper caste Hindu contributors to this charity show will grow jealous and curse the recipients as ‘Government Brahmins’. Both ways, it is unfair to the alms-giver as well as to the alms-taker. Crores of rupees have been pumped into this system of reservations that is sociologically termed ‘protective discrimination’, in jobs and educational benefits that is unparalleled in the whole world because in no other country is there the problem of untouchability. The system has created more complications and jealousy than benefits. The charge is that the entire money and effort has gone down the drain. Except for producing an elite among the Dalits, the system of reservations has done the greatest disservice to the class as a whole. It has created more enemies than friends in this self-defeating process.

Where has all the money gone? Part of it, no doubt, has gone to the plethora of ‘Harijan welfare’ activities listed in any of the Government publications distributed to the legislators on the eve of the ritualistic debates on these subjects and other occasions. But a major portion has gone to create a well-

oiled cadre of professional elite drawn from the Dalits. The complaint often voiced by the upper caste Hindus is that this elite eats away all the funds in the name of their less fortunate people. The Karnataka Legislative Committee on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes headed by Mrs. Winniefred Fernandes (Congress M.L.A.) has come to the very same conclusion after inspecting the different Government-aided Harijan hostels: 'The recent surprise inspection by the Legislature Committee on the Welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has revealed serious irregularities like inflated attendance of inmates and insufficient supply of food to a number of aided and Government hostels for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The committee headed by Smt. Winniefred F. Fernandes has concluded that those in charge of some of the hostels were amassing wealth in the name of the weaker sections of the society. It was stated that the conditions prevailing in all other scheduled caste and scheduled tribe hostels in the State were no better than those in the ones dealt within the report.'¹

Because of this complaint a number of non-Congress Dalit organisations have been forced to perform the double task of fighting this 'elitism' and also rousing the Dalit rank and file from apathy.

Many top Dalit leaders like Union Minister B. P. Maurya and former Tamil Nadu Minister Sathyavani Muthu, B. Basavalingappa and others admit this fact and say that 'reservations' have converted Dalits into a mass of beggars. The moment a 'Harijan' gets a little education, he is lost to the community. His desire is to get a white-collar job and this scramble for Government posts will soon transform the new generation of Dalits into an army of clerks. 'No new Ambedkars are appearing among the young, it is said; instead they are revealing themselves as self-engrossed people who are quickly and easily satisfied with the small gains they can win for themselves.'² Since clerical posts are easily available with some 'influence', Dalits prefer to get into petty Government

¹ *Indian Express*, September 28, 1975.

² Harold Isaacs, 'India's Ex-Untouchables,' *Imprint*, June 1965, p. 91.

jobs for the sake of livelihood instead of studying further. With non-Government intellectual and other cultural avenues barred, the Dalits are forced to seek salvation in petty Government posts which will debar them permanently from participating in any Dalit activity. That is the reason why the entire teaching field in Karnataka is devoid of any top Dalit figure except for Dr. Parvathamma and one or two lesser figures. Barring one person, Dalits have made no contribution to the field of journalism. And this person has carefully hidden his identity since he is sure to be in disfavour the moment he is found to be an outcast.

The system of reservations has played havoc with the Dalits. It is a double-edged dagger, on the one side, killing the initiative, drive and capacity of the Dalit and on the other side, helping the upper-caste-controlled ruling party to force the Dalit to permanently wait at their doorsteps for the crumbs of charity.

Tell-Tale figures

Let us briefly examine the impact of this charity in Karnataka which has among its 3-crore population (1971 census) a total of 38.50 lakhs scheduled castes (13.14 per cent) and 2.32 lakh tribes (0.79 per cent). Besides this, another 45 per cent of the State's population is declared as 'backward' by the Havanur Commission and with this a staggering total of about 60 per cent of the Karnataka's population can be classified as Dalits.

Where do they stand in regard to literacy? If the State average is 31.54 per cent the percentage of literacy for Scheduled Castes is 13.88 and 14.69 for Scheduled Tribes. It is equally poor for the other backward classes.

With all the massive dosage of funds pumped into the education of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, a total of 17,492 scheduled caste pupils and 580 scheduled tribe pupils appeared for the VII Standard examination in 1974 (March-

April) as against 30,502 pupils from Brahmins whose total state population is 12.39 lakhs (4.23 %)³.

In the State police service scheduled castes had the following strength :

Class I—9 ; Class II—1 ; Class III—444 and Class IV—4,358.⁴

Universities : In the Karnataka University Syndicate, Dalits had no representation while Lingayats had 13 seats and Brahmins 2. In the Mysore University Syndicate, out of the total of 16 seats Harijans had two and other low castes had one. Of the 54 members of the Board of Regents of Agriculture University, Bangalore, Scheduled Castes had only one seat.

M. B. Ramaswamy, a scheduled caste Congress M.L.A., in a booklet called, *Believe It or Not* (1975) has given the following tell-tale figures of Dalit representation in Karnataka Government and allied services :

- (1) Out of four Universities, there has never been a single Vice-Chancellor, belonging to scheduled caste or scheduled tribe.
- (2) Out of 80 departments, there is not a single Head of department belonging to scheduled castes or scheduled tribes.
- (3) In the supertime scale of I.A.S., I.P.S. and I.F.S., out of 40, not even one is from Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.

Do You Know ?

1. Not even a single person belonging to scheduled castes or scheduled tribes has been recruited to the teaching post in Bangalore University, Karnataka University and University of Agriculture Science, ever since their inception !

³ *Backward Classes Commission Report*, Vol. 2, pp. 245-249 and 251.

⁴ Answer given to the State Assembly by the Chief Minister in April 1976 to a question by M. B. Ramaswamy, Congress M.L.A.

2. The number of Assistant Engineers that ought to have been directly recruited according to the existing C and R Rules since 1962 is 730 and this has not been done resulting in :

- (a) loss of 53 posts for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for ever, and
- (b) about 10 persons eligible for promotion made permanently ineligible because of over-age.

3. The C and R Rules are changed/modified or not implemented or promotions stopped/denied/delayed just at the time Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes are to get the benefit.

4. Out of about 1,000 Sub Inspectors of Police, the representation given to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes during the last 10 years is almost nil !

Banks : The A.I.C.C. has released the following figures (per cent) of Scheduled Caste representation in the Nationalised banks in the country. 'Central Bank of India (0.23) ; Bank of India (0.18) ; Punjab National Bank (0.0) ; Bank of Baroda (0.08) ; United Commercial Bank (0.36) ; Canara Bank (0.0) ; United Bank of India (0.30) ; Dena Bank (0.09) ; Syndicate Bank (0.09) ; Union Bank of India (0.40) ; Allahabad Bank (0.0) ; Indian Bank (0.60) ; Bank of Maharashtra (0.40) ; and Indian Overseas Bank (0.4) '.⁵

What is the position in the public sector factories ? Here is a press report : 'The third report of the Committee of the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Tribes presented to the State Legislature today, painted a heart-rending picture of the state of these downtrodden classes in practically every public sector undertaking, Government financed autonomous corporation and board which, it said, had grossly violated the constitutional provision for getting them jobs.

The Committee headed by Mrs. Sheila Irani, a nominated Anglo-Indian member of the Assembly, felt the report just fulfilled an annual ritual and both the Government and the institutions financed by it were deaf to its repeated recommendations.

⁵ *Indian Express*, Bangalore, October 23, 1975.

Year after year it recommended action against the chairman or managing directors of such institutions. The Committee was shocked to find that when it visited certain institutions, the authorities had no information about its scheduled castes and scheduled tribes employees. Not only that, in some industrial units the chairman or the managing director even went to the extent of showing disrespect to this all-important legislature committee by being invariably absent.

Sick of the whole thing and finding these institutions impervious to Government order, the committee has recommended setting up of a Cabinet sub-committee headed by the Chief Minister himself to review the performance of these public sector undertakings and other autonomous organisations on matters of recruitment. It also recommended a separate selection board for recruitment of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for these undertakings as was being done in Uttar Pradesh.⁶

So far none of the Committees' recommendation has been implemented by the Government.

If this is the situation of constitutional reservations in recruitment, the position is still worse in admission to educational institutions. The Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the Karnataka Legislature in its report (1972-73) says :

It is the honest feeling of the Committee that when the population of the weaker sections including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes is 80 per cent only a few castes whose population is about 20 per cent have been allowed to reap all the benefits in the field of university education. This kind of monopoly of a few stronger sections has led to their monopoly of all higher posts, in the administrative service and also the monopoly of the political power in the State. If the present state of affairs were allowed to continue in the name of democratic set-up and autonomy in the Universities, in about a period of 20 years if not a period of 10 years, the education of the weaker sections, in particular scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, in the field of university education will go from bad to worse and these weaker sections will not be allowed to occupy even an ordinary position in the universities and also in other services.

The Committee, therefore, suggests that an enquiry commission be constituted to investigate into the constitutional

⁶ *Indian Express*, March 15, 1975.

omissions committed by these universities during the past 35 years and responsibility fixed on those who were responsible for the same.⁷

Till this day, no steps have been taken to set right the anti-Dalit situation in the field of education.

Lack of Political Will

Right from the President of India downwards everybody admits that the 'concessions' extended to Dalits have not reached them. Some people, like Vice President B. D. Jatti, pin the blame on the Government machinery. But everybody is unanimous that 'reservations' have not brought about the desired effect in the lot of Dalits. 'There has been hardly any improvement in the social status or economic condition of the most vulnerable sections of these classes in the villages, except perhaps marginally here and there in such matters as water supply and housing. The majority still remains a vast pool of ignorance and destitution'.⁸

Shankarrao Mane, Scheduled Caste Commissioner to the Government of India, has made a frank admission of his helplessness: 'The position of the scheduled castes and tribes had not improved substantially during these years because of a lack of political will, according to Mr. Mane. He has agreed that politics is run on caste lines and that election tickets are given by most political parties on caste consideration.'⁹

And as long as there is no 'political will', any amount of charity will go down the drain—creating greater bitterness among the upper castes and greater servitude among the Dalits. The sooner we end this dichotomy the better it will be for the society as a whole. Are the upper castes ready for this?

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁸ B. K. R. Kabad in *Times of India*, January 8, 1976.

⁹ *Hindustan Times*, December 8, 1974.

Ultimately, however, the future of the Dalits in this country depends on themselves—their awakening, their consciousness of human rights, the militancy of their organised efforts, their capacity to forge, in their struggle, unity with the other oppressed classes in Indian society like the Tribals and workers and minorities like the Muslims. No social liberation will come about through mere charity. Dalits must develop their own political will.

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